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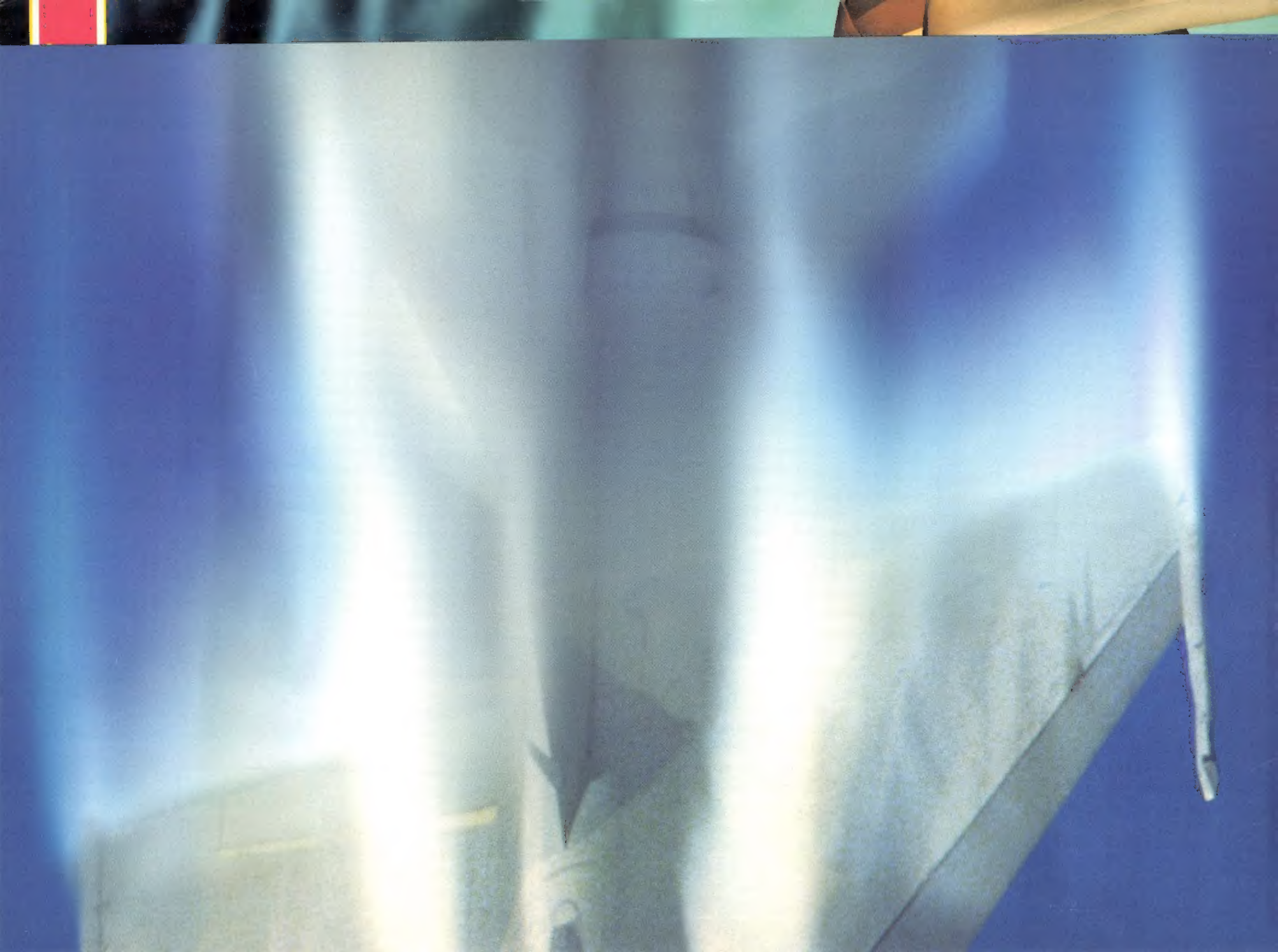

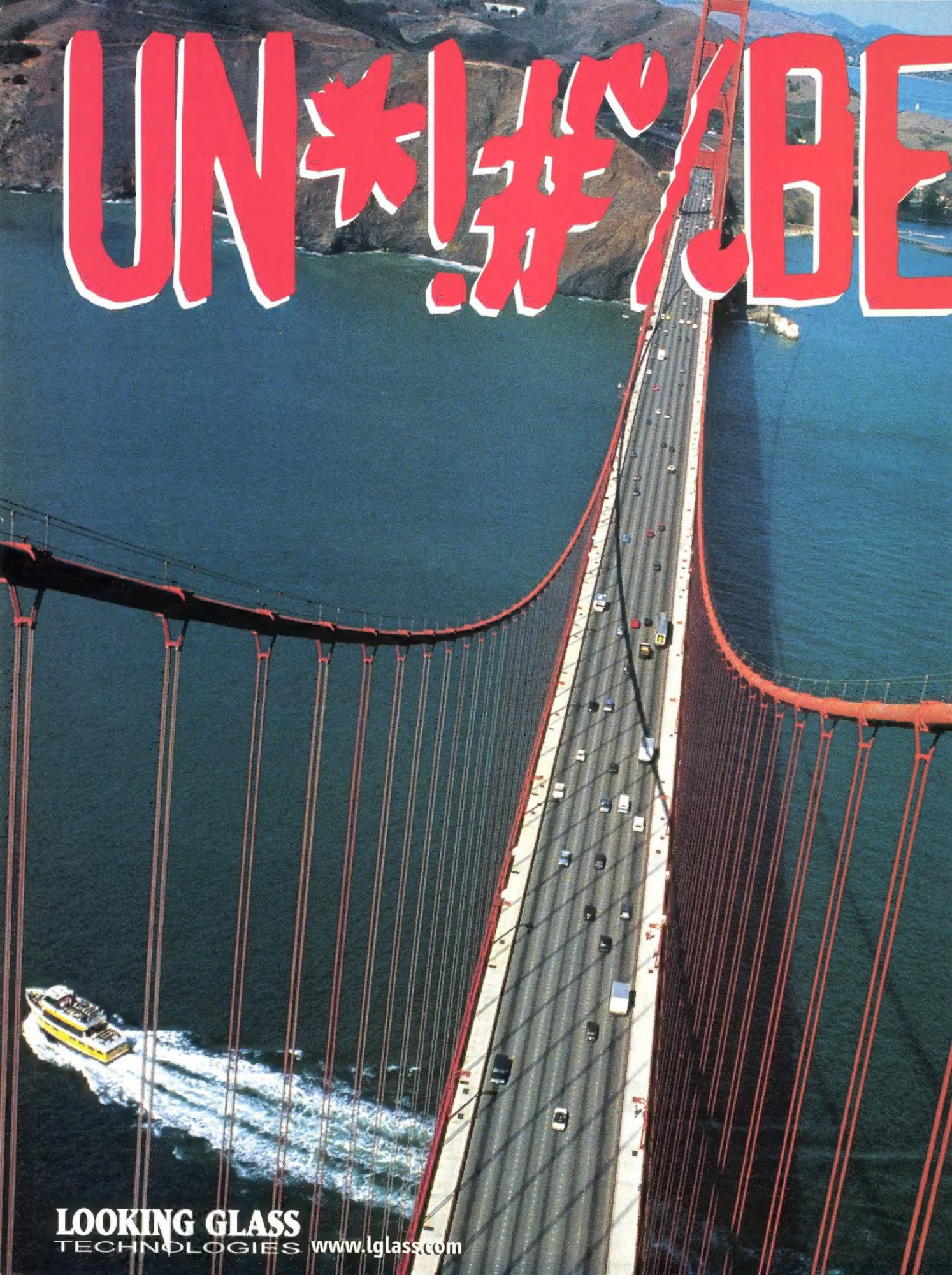
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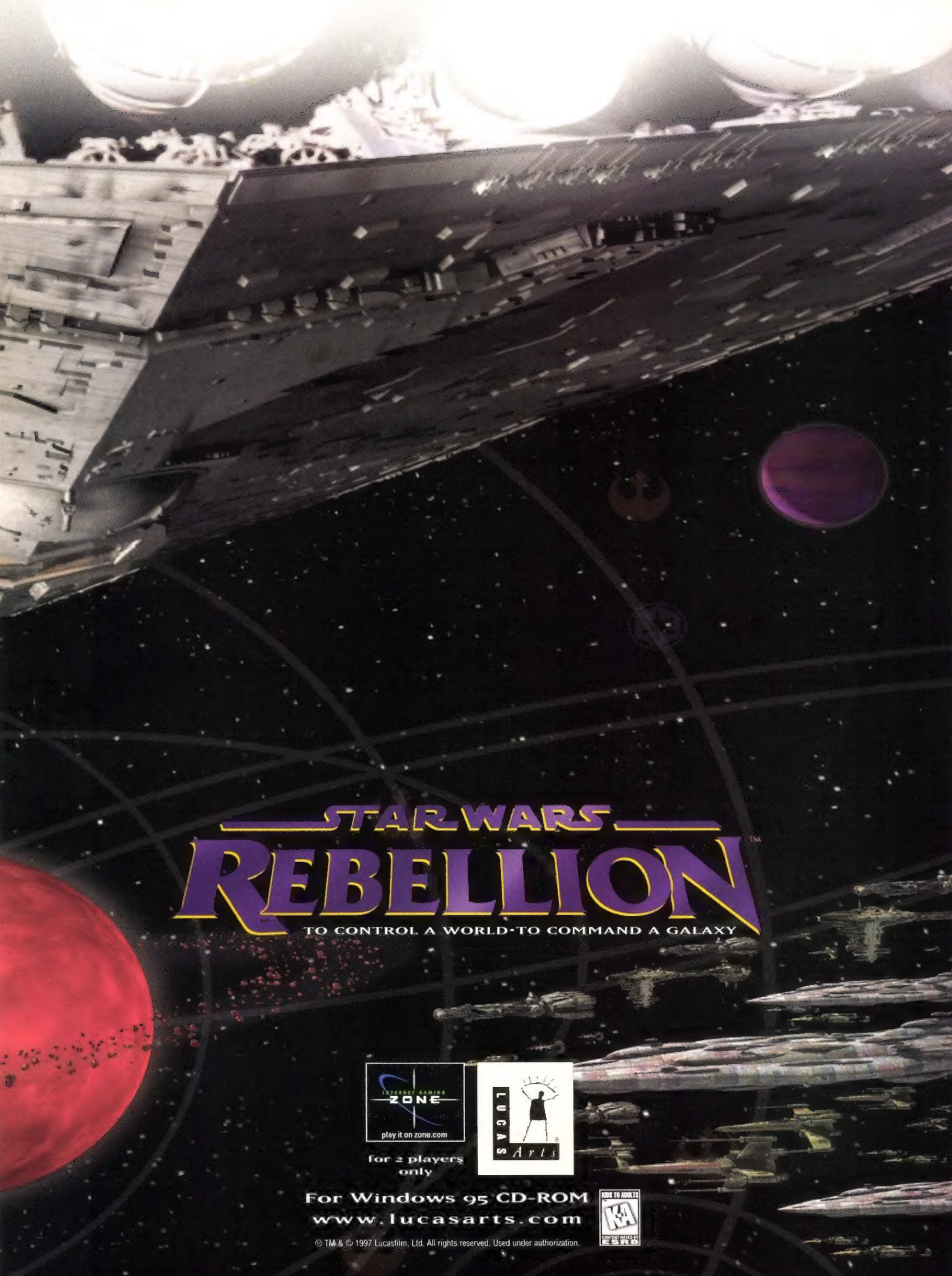
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FEBRUARY 1998
VOLUME 5, NUMBER 2

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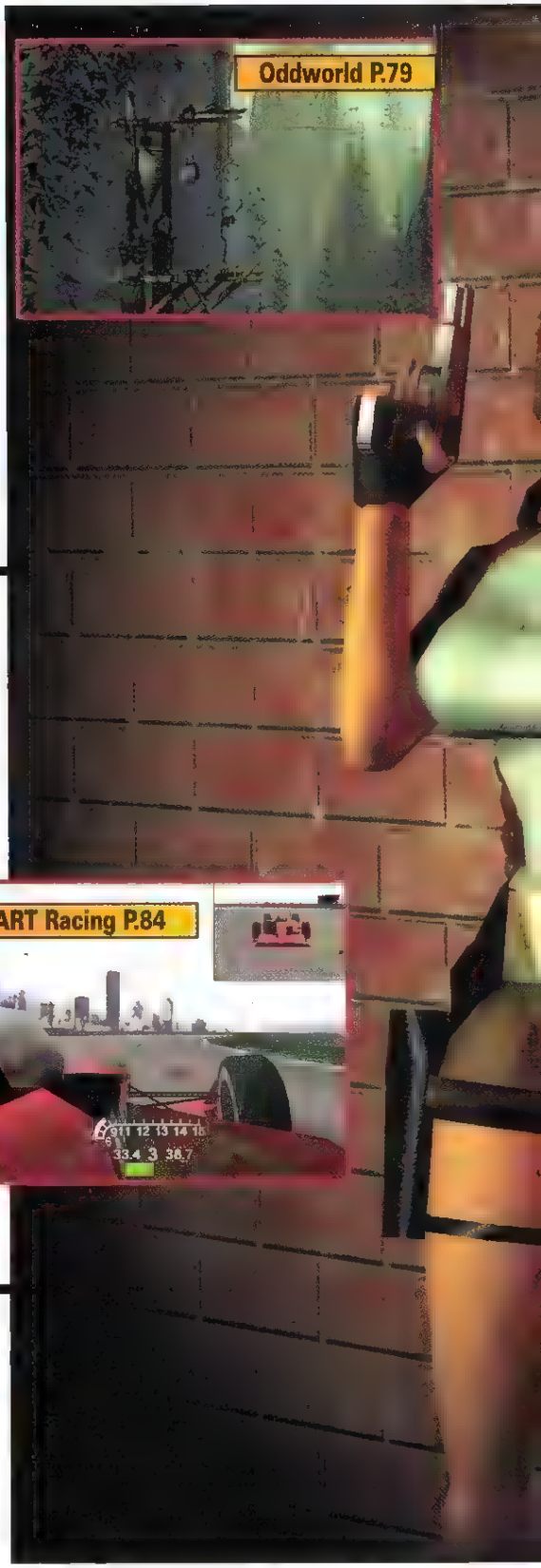

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DRUM ROLL, PLEASE

48 Editors' Choice Awards

By the *PC Games* Staff

It ain't the Academy Awards, but we don't give a frag. We got together, traded blows, passed bribes, and came up with a list of the best games, gaming hardware, and game peripherals of 1997, plus our editors' personal favorites. See what we think is the best stuff from last year, including:

- GAME OF THE YEAR
- BEST ACTION GAME
- BEST REAL-TIME STRATEGY GAME
- BEST TURN-BASED STRATEGY GAME
- BEST ADVENTURE GAME
- BEST FLIGHT SIM
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THIS CHICK RULES!

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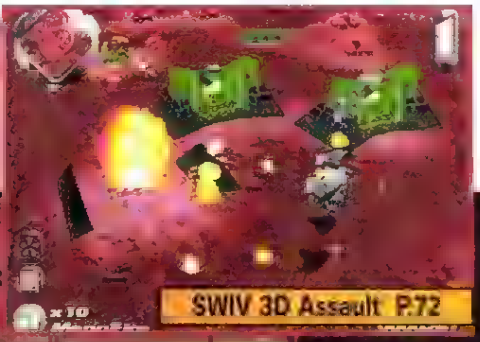
By Daniel Morris

Computer-game poster girl Lara Croft is back for another adventure—and it's bloody fantastic. We give you more of Lara than anyone else, with an exclusive Tomb II review, tips, cheats, and a pin-up that'll leave you warm all over this Valentine's Day.

Connecting Gamers to Games



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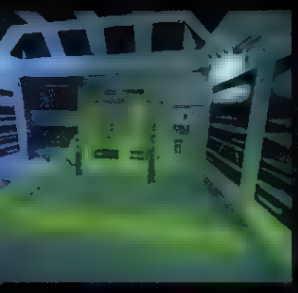
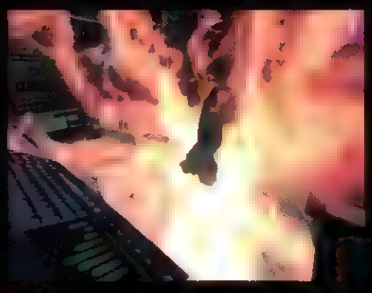
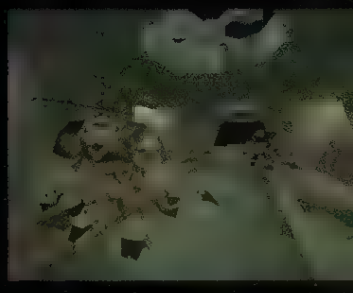
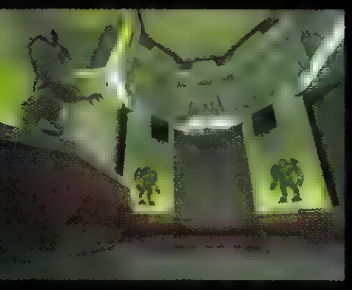
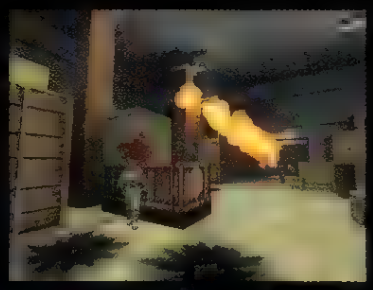


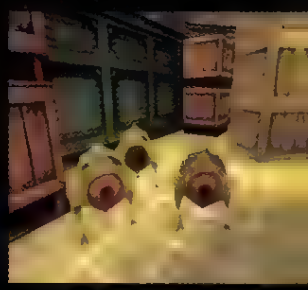


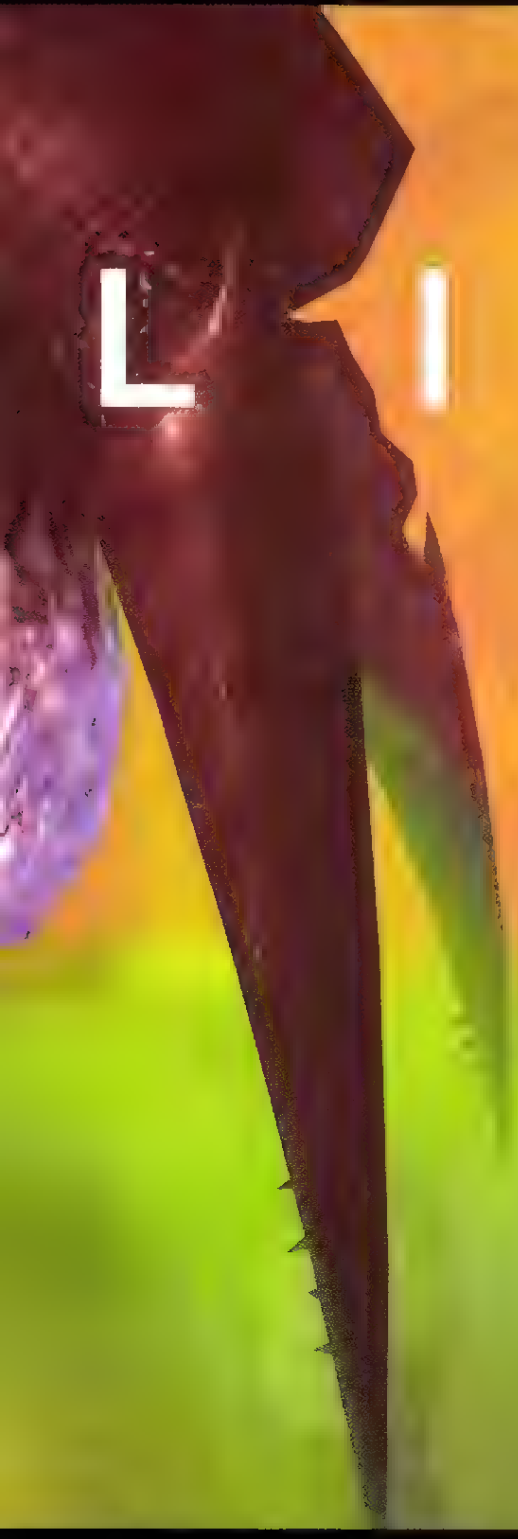


HALF-

Voted **Best Action Game** at this year's E3





"Half-Life may very well redefine the standard for action games."
–PC Games

HALF-LIFE

"The best first-person shooter we've seen."
–Gamespot

"Half-Life has some of the best adversaries in the entire action game genre...[it] eclipses the enemy AI in any other action game to date."
–Computer Gaming World

"Gorgeous dynamic textures and intricate levels."
–PC Games

"Valve's skeletal animation system provides gamers with some of the most eerily life-like opponents they've ever seen."
–Computer and Net Player

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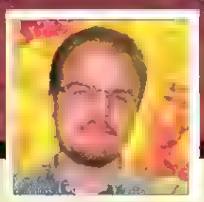

STEVE KLETT

She's Baa-aack...

Lara Croft is everywhere these days—from *Time* magazine's 50 Most Influential People in Cyberspace list to desktop wallpaper the world over to countless magazine covers, including ours this month.

Yes, it's clear the world has embraced Lara Croft (no pun intended)—in fact, her hype outpaces the popularity of the game. Is it out of control? Are we getting too much Lara Croft? No way.

The game industry needs a leading lady like Ms. Croft to offset the plethora of male action characters. Yes, Lara's poise, confidence, and profile are a welcome change from the stereotypical crudeness of the Quake Dude and coolness of Mr. Duke Nukem. It's refreshing to see a strong, independent female game character receive a bounty of attention for once.

And indeed, the attention is for more than Lara's Hollywood figure (although, admittedly, that certainly doesn't hurt in the male-dominated game world). Simply put, Lara Croft is one cool customer who—on the PC and consoles, and perhaps soon on the big screen—has rivaled Indiana Jones' notoriety. If you think you're getting too much of her now, we've got news for ya: It's only going to get worse.

However, like most of you, *PC Games* editors are Lara fans, and what better way to celebrate her success—and her return to the PC—than with this month's exclusive Lara Croft centerfold, our Valentine's Day gift to Lara fans everywhere. In addition to Lara's likes and dislikes, you'll find info on a new character Eidos has in the wings. Her name is Red Lotus, and she'll make her debut in Deathtrap Dungeon early this year. Think of her as Lara's evil cousin...

But we didn't stop there. *PC Games* went the extra mile to bring you the exclusive review, cheats, and tips for Tomb Raider II, beginning on page 62. Lara's back, and she's bolder, brasher, and cooler than ever in her latest adventure, which is sure to please fans of the original game—as well as newcomers who want to see what all the fuss is about.

We are also proud to present the fifth installment of *PC Games*' coveted Editors' Choice Awards. Our awards are selected from the best stuff—games, components, and peripherals—that appeared in *PC Games* from January 1997 through December 1997 (which is why you won't find titles that shipped right before year's end, like Quake II, Starcraft, and Myth: they'll have to wait for next year's awards). We got into more than a few arguments and fistfights over these, so let us know what you think, or what you think we missed. And congratulations to all the winning companies!

Happy gaming.

Steve Klett

Steve Klett
Editor-in-Chief
sklett@pcgames.com

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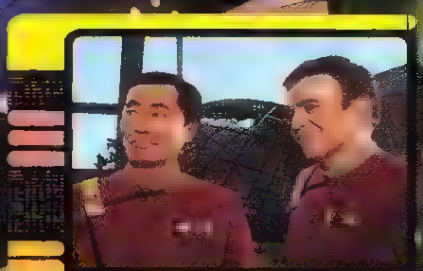

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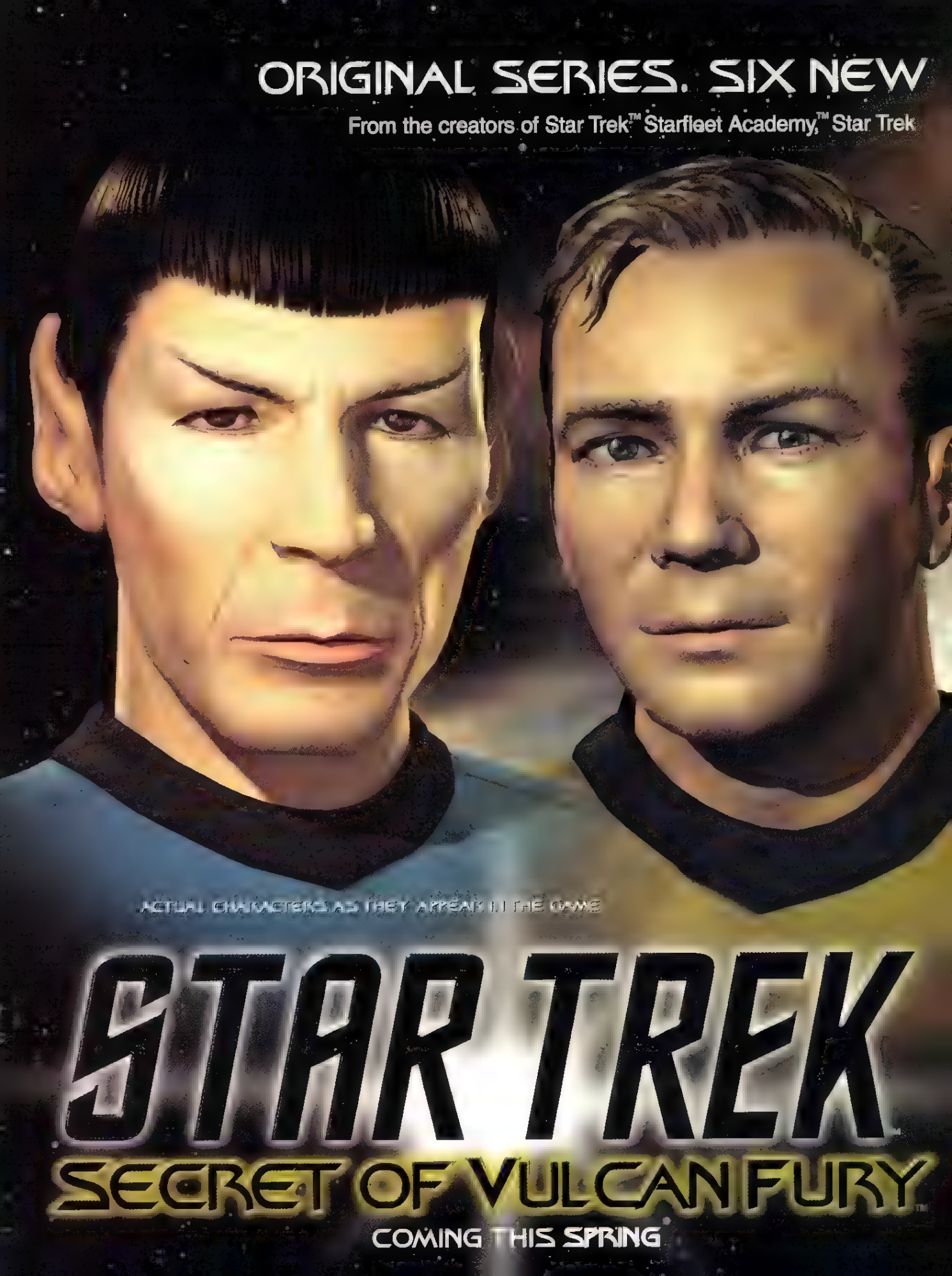
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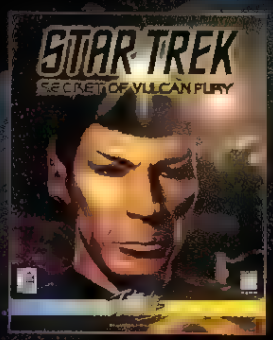

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CART Precision Racing (Microsoft)
Dark Reign (Activision)
FIFA 98: Road to the World Cup (EA)
Grand Slam '98 (Virgin)
The Great Battles of Hannibal (I-Magic)
Madden NFL Football 98 (EA)
Myth: The Fallen Lords (Bungie)
NBA Action '98 (Sega Entertainment)
NHL 98 (EA)
Tanarus (Sony Interactive Studios)
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Virtua Squad 2 (Sega Entertainment)
VR Baseball '98 (Interplay)
X-Men: The Ravages of Apocalypse (Marvel)

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- C&C: Red Alert Enabler
- Deadlock Shareware
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Mplayer
- Big Red Racing Enabler
- Command & Conquer Enabler
- C&C: Red Alert Enabler
- Quake Enabler

HEAT

Getting Started

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Win 3.1
Insert the CD in your disc drive. In Program Manager, select the File menu and then Run. In the command-line box, type d:\pcgames.exe (where "d" is the letter of your disc drive).

Tech-Help FAQ

Q: When I run the interface, I get a message that says "Can't find VB40016.dll" or some other "Can't find" file error.
A: *Just run the setup file by clicking on the Start button, Run, then type d:\setup.pif (where "d" is the letter of your CD-ROM drive).*

Q: During the setup routine, I get a message that says "Can't register file."
A: *In this case, you will get a dialog box asking to Abort, Retry, or Ignore the error. Click on Ignore. The setup routine will be executed successfully, and the interface will run without problems.*

Q: This demo doesn't work.
A: *Read the notes accompanying each game in the description box—they'll cover most eventualities. Refer any game-specific tech-support questions to the game's publisher. Help is also usually posted on publishers' Web sites.*

Q: Should I reinstall DirectX when prompted by a game's install program?
A: *As a rule, no. Be aware that most current demos now use DirectX 5.0, which can be found in the root directory of the CD-ROM.*

Q: I didn't get the CD-ROM with my magazine. How can I obtain one?
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Empire Interactive's Pro Pinball: Timeshock! Giveaway

Not content with supplying a CD packed with great game demos, *PC Games* has something special this month. As a follow-up to the superb Pro Pinball: The Web, Empire's new Pro Pinball: Timeshock! is the closest you'll get to playing pinball on the PC. The level of detail in this sim is amazing, enhanced by stunning graphics and even a cohesive time-travel storyline as a backdrop to the buzzers, flashes, and spinners. So load up the Pro Pinball: Timeshock! demo on the CD, or grab it from *PC Games*' Web site (www.pcgames.com). Play it for three balls or the five-minute limit, and work that wizardry to post a high score. Write down the score and the corresponding 32-digit encrypted code on the entry form, and mail it in to the address below (or you can enter online at www.pcgames.com). You can play the demo as many times as you like, but you can only enter one score.

The entrant with the highest score wins the pretty-damn-fine Terminator 2 pinball machine. The next 5 highest scores receive a copy of the game, the next 10 get polo shirts, and the next 50 nab posters. It pays to play.

See complete contest rules on page 100.

Played the demo? Got a high score and encrypted code? Great! Fill out this entry form or visit www.pcgames.com for your chance to win.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____ Daytime phone ( ) _____

Email address (optional) _____ Age _____

High Score _____ Encrypted code: _____ - _____ - _____ - _____

_____ - _____ - _____ - _____

Complete and mail this entry to:
Pro Pinball: Timeshock! Giveaway, c/o PC Games, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd. Ste. 700, San Mateo, CA 94404
No purchase necessary. Contest open to all US residents. All entries must be received by 2-9-98. Void where prohibited by law.
See complete contest rules on page 100.

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ACT LOCALLY – KILL

NAME: Douglas McClure

HOMETOWN: Kokomo, IN

RANK IN NET FIGHTER: 1st

DEGREES EARNED: 235,000, traded 27,500 to buy Quake™ in the HEAT store

"I USED TO SMILE AND HAND PEOPLE THEIR FRENCH FRIES, SECRETLY IMAGINING A GIANT TARGET ON EACH ONE'S CHEST AS THEY WALKED TO THE KETCHUP STAND. AFTER I PLAYED OTHERS ON HEAT.NET'S NET FIGHTER, I FELT BETTER AND SUDDENLY ALL THE TARGETS DISAPPEARED!"

HEAT USER NAME: reniu

TOURNAMENT RECORD: 12-2

FAVORITE SPECIAL MOVE: swinging knife decapitation

TRASH TALK EXCERPT: "Now that's what you call a super-close shave!"

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GLOBALLY ON HEAT.NET!

NAME: Bill Shultz

HOMETOWN: Portsmouth, VA

RANK IN NET FIGHTER: 2nd

DEGREES EARNED: 197,500, traded 17,500 to buy Scud: Industrial Evolution™ in the HEAT store

"I USED TO TAKE OUT MY BULLETS, AND ON EACH ONE I WOULD WRITE THE NAME OF EACH PERSON ON MY BUS. THEN A FRIEND SHOWED ME I COULD PURGE MY VIOLENT URGES IN NET FIGHTER ON HEAT.NET AGAINST OTHER PEOPLE. THANKS TO HEAT, THE PEOPLE ON MY BUS WILL NEVER KNOW HOW CLOSE THEY CAME!"

HEAT USER NAME: thunderhammer

TOURNAMENT RECORD: 9-3

FAVORITE SPECIAL MOVE: forked lightning kick

TRASH TALK EXCERPT: "Stop hitting like a sissy girl!"

OTHER FAVORITE GAMES ON HEAT.NET: Blood,™ Duke Nukem,™ Total Annihilation,™ Shadow Warrior,™ Postal™

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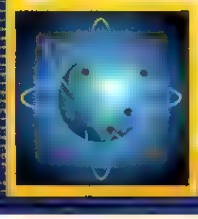

For Demos and Patches, go to www.gamedemos.com

DEMOS

Dark Reign
F/A-18 Korea
Fighting Force
Madden NFL 98
NCAA Football 98
Total Annihilation
WAR, Inc.

PATCHES

Men In Black NT
Jetfighter III (JFIII edit)
Madden NFL 98
NHL Powerplay '98
Shadow Warrior 3Dfx
G Police PowerVR
Sub Culture Voodoo Rush
and more...

PREVIEWS

Battlezone
Cyberswine
F-1 Racing
Tonic Trouble
Wargames

REVIEWS

Evolution
Jet Moto
Twisted Metal 2
and more...

IDGGAMES.NET!

Don't adjust your monitor! That's still PC Games Online at **www.pcgames.com**, only we've got a new look and are now part of something bigger: Games.net—The IDG Games Network. Games.net (**www.games.net**), the new mega-games site launched by PC World Online, is a one-stop online service dedicated to all things games-related. This joint venture appeals to both hardcore and casual gamers and delivers content currently produced on the Web by PC Games Online, TipWorld, *PC World*'s Online Game Channel, and *THE WEB* magazine. With the launch of Games.net, all of the latest news, reviews, previews, demos, and tips—plus *PC Games* exclusives and community-driven features such as chats and live events—will be showcased within one easy-to-use interface. Come see us at our new home!

TOMB II: A CLOSER LOOK

If our magazine coverage didn't convince you that this is one hot game, or if you're playing it and wondering what lies ahead, check out our expanded look at TRII. We'll show you key portions of each level and offer tips on conquering the roughest parts of this challenging adventure.

SNEAK PEEKS!

The latest batch of previews covers all the bases. We'll give you the scoop on Battlezone, the update of Atari's classic vector-graphics tank blast; Wargames, a real-time strategy game (based on the movie of the same name) where you wage 3D war against a military computer; and Tonic Trouble, a Mario-like adventure through creative, colorful lands.

TONS OF STRATEGY!

We've got loads of tips for the latest games, including walkthroughs for the stunning side-scroller Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee and the new Men In Black game. And don't forget to catch the rest of our Incubation tips, continued from this month's Strategy & Tactics section.

THE FAN

Sports games get their due with The Fan, our tribute to the titles that take real-world athletics to the little screen. Each week, our Web crew's sweatiest member passes previews, reviews, and interviews your way—and offers hints for his favorite games.

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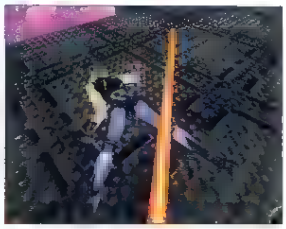
GAMES.NET

HAPPY PUPPY

GamesDomain

We've joined up with Happy Puppy and GamesDomain to provide you with even more info and coverage on all the new games being released!

www.pcgames.com



THE SNIPER

Months later, he's still sniping—and plotting the deaths of millions of little characters in computer games everywhere. Get a lesson in winning, honor be damned, from the man with the cheapest tactics in the gaming universe.

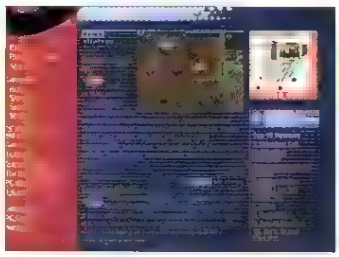
GRUMPY GAMER

He's back! After some time off to collect himself, our cranky, curmudgeonly gamester is back with gripes aplenty. Always insightful, always provocative, the Grumpy Gamer rants on about computer gaming's worst offenders.

THIS OLD DOG'S GOT A COOL NEW TRICK...

If you haven't already seen Happy Puppy's sharp new design, you should hop over to **happypuppy.com** and check it out. The new mascot is a tougher dog whose wiseacre look embodies the site's good-natured irreverence—and the colors and graphic style throughout are both hip and cute. Happy Puppy's changes aren't just cosmetic, either: the pages load more quickly, and the new navigation not only makes everything easier to find, it also showcases some previously buried features, like the chat room and the huge directory of Web games (ones you can play right in your browser). The first major commercial games-based Web site has matured with the medium and remains on the forefront of what gamers really want.

YOUR FAVORITE DOWNLOADS



Always searching for the hottest downloadable demo? Or maybe you just need the newest patch for a game you already have. Either way, we've got it covered inside our Downloads section. And we've taken downloading demos to the next level. How many times have you spent hours downloading a game just because the title sounds halfway decent, only to play it and find yourself ready to puke in utter disgust? Us, too—that's why we've included a short review with most demos. See the previous page for a sample of some of the many demos you can download.

FEATURES

Want the full scoop on a hot new developer? Or maybe you'd like a recap of last year's 3D cards, best and worst. You'll get these kinds of stories and more in our Features section, where we give full coverage to the stuff you want to read about.

NEWS

Our News section gives you the latest word on games, gamemakers, and everything else in the world of computer games. We update this section daily, so keep on comin'!

INTERVIEWS

Pull up an ear as we get up close and chatty with Sid Meier, John Romero, Ron Millar, and more of the gaming world's biggest stars.

CHEATS

Having trouble beating that one mission or killing that one creature? Check out our cheats for some gaming greats—and for new games, too, like Men In Black.

STRATEGIES

Tips and tactics for some of your favorite challenges, including Age of Empires, Dungeon Keeper, Jedi Knight, and more!

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IT'S OPENING NIGHT IN THE THEATER OF BATTLE...

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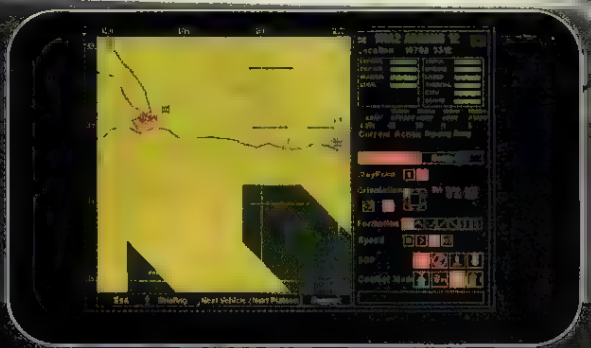

SEAT.

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INCOMING!

Question of the Month:

Music in Games?

This year's Editors' Choice Awards included two for best music: for I-76's dazzlingly funky soundtrack and Jedi Knight's amazing use of John Williams' *Star Wars* score. But what do you think of music in games? Important? Not important? Does a good soundtrack enhance a game (or even detract from it), and if so, how? Would you pay more for a game with great music like Trent Reznor's original Quake theme? One randomly chosen letter writer gets a free game and a free *PC Games* T shirt. Sound off to PC Games, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd., Suite 700, San Mateo, CA 94404; fax: 650-349-7482; email: pcgamesletters@pcgames.com. Please include your full name with each letter.

The Meaning of Games

Dear Player,

I just have one question: After a real long time of playing a game (i.e., two hours or more), do you ever sit back and ask yourself, "What experience did I just gain that I can really use?" I ask myself this question and feel guilty sometimes, when I know I could've been outside motocrossing, or playing lacrosse, or doing something physical. I was just wondering if anyone else feels that way sometimes. You seem educated on both fronts, so I decided to ask you.

Brian Roche

Via email

I do feel guilty if I'm inside on a nice day playing a game. (Not too guilty, though—see this month's column.) I'd say play lacrosse over games, but play games over TV and definitely during any sort of inclement weather—like when the temp drops below 70 degrees, it's cloudy, there's a 5 percent chance of rain...

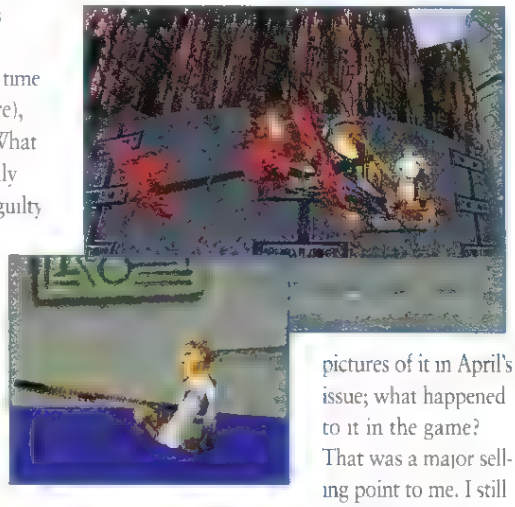
—The Player

Jedi Mind Trick?

I'm an avid subscriber and reader of *PC Games*. I think the staff does a great job.

There is one thing that I'm mad about, though. I love action games, especially ones with a *Star Wars* story. I bought the original Dark Forces and had a ball. When I read about Jedi Knight in your April 1997 issue, I was excited. I read about riding the speeder and battling with a lightsaber, and I knew I'd buy the game. I did.

You're probably wondering what I'm mad about. Well, it's the speeder. There are four



pictures of it in April's issue; what happened to it in the game? That was a major selling point to me. I still love the game (especially the lightsaber and the multiplay), but I'm disappointed that you let me think there was a speeder.

I'll still continue to read your magazine, but please try to only show and write about things that are definite. I know this probably isn't all your fault: LucasArts probably gave the pictures to you. I just think you should make the companies only give pictures of units sure to be in the game.

Your #1 reader,

Seth Moore

Via email

P.S.—There's also no Tusken prod; it was replaced by a bowcaster.

We understand your annoyance, Seth, though you're right—the speeder slew isn't really our fault. But we wouldn't necessarily give Lucas too hard a time over it, either. Though we agree that companies' early peeks at games should accurately reflect what the game is going to look like and include, we also realize that game making, like any production process, involves lots of fine-tuning. Game designers often aim to include a certain cool gameplay element, only to find that it's not practical within the limits of the game's engine, that it would be better replaced by something else, or it would delay the game without a reasonable payoff. In the case of Jedi, Lucas says the speeder was dropped mainly for the last reason.

Don't get us wrong—a speeder in Jedi would've been cool, and it's sad to see it go the way of the dragon in Quake. And if its absence dramatically affected gameplay—like the omission of multiplay in Magic: The Gathering, for example—we'd reflect that in our review. But, as you say, Jedi's still a great game without the speeder, and LucasArts clearly put the energy it would've devoted to this feature into other aspects of the game. To us, that's an acceptable trade-off.

—Ed.

Dark Raves

After reading about Dark Earth in November's issue, I knew I had to have it! Being a loyal fan of motor-sports sims, this was unusual, and I assumed I was paying through the teeth for the great graphics. But after booting it up, I'm happy to say that your magazine's A rating was well deserved. You can see the three long years of work flickering before your eyes, and the settings are beautiful and haunting.

N'kk

Via email

Just wanted to drop a quick thanks for turning me on to Dark Earth. I had pretty much written it off until I read your review. I decided to go ahead and give it a try, and I've been very impressed! The game is all you said it was and more. Thanks again for turning me on to a great game that probably would have slipped through my fingers.

Jeff VanCuren

Via email

The *Enterprise* has been infected by the Borg...again.

At Last—a *Trek* Shooter!

Star Trek fans have waited a long time for a first-person shooter built from the ground up as a *Trek* game. Sure, there have been Doom and Quake *Trek* mods, some of them very good, but no pure action games based on the series or movies. This spring, Sector 001 of the Federation will finally get its shooter, MicroProse's Star Trek: First Contact.

A 3D accelerator will do wonders for how an attacking Borg will look.

Long the steward of the *Next Generation* license, MicroProse is again adapting a *TNG* feature film for the PC. Last year's Star Trek: Generations game was probably better than the movie that sired it, but while it had first-person elements, the genre hybrid lacked appeal to all but diehard *Trek* gamers. *First Contact* saw the return of the Borg to their rightful status as *TNG*'s premier adversaries—providing a storyline and situations much more in keeping with a first-person action game. Given that, and faced with Interplay's starship combat simulator Starfleet Academy, MicroProse chose to rethink its *TNG* franchise—licensing Unreal's first-person 3D-engine technology and partnering with Visionary Media to develop its next *Trek* game.

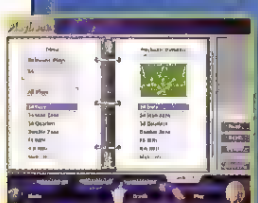
Rather than replay the events in the movie, the First Contact game picks up immediately after the end of the film, says producer Michael Mancuso. The defeated Borg queen has left a part of herself within the *Enterprise*'s computer core as a protected program. This program becomes active, freeing several captured Borg drones being held in stasis and seizing control of a research scientist examining them. A new Borg infection of the *Enterprise* begins—and it's up to you to investigate and eradicate them.

"First Contact is an action game with problem-solving elements," Mancuso says. "The Borg adapt to Federation weapons quickly, which means that you have to manage your attacks carefully and use the ship's computer to examine Borg technology you capture in order to fight them successfully."

In this way, First Contact is closer to story-based actioners such as Half-Life or SiN than pure shooters like Quake, Mancuso says. Players must also find remodulated phaser energy packs

continued on page 39

COVERT OPS



New Madden playbook.

At the Wire

Diamond & Creative Get Voodoo II

It's official: Diamond and Creative have confirmed they will release Voodoo II–based accelerators sometime during the first three months of 1998. Early reports, including those in *PC Games*, had originally pegged Voodoo II arrival for late 1997. Those reports proved to be overly optimistic, but barring an unforeseen mishap, both Diamond and Creative believe they'll be able to make a Q1 deadline.

Diamond executives would not confirm or deny whether original Voodoo I Monster 3Ds will continue to be produced as a low-cost, entry-level 3D option. Creative has indicated that it will likely use the 3D Blaster name on its Voodoo II card. Diamond has also stated that it will release its next-generation DVD-ROM drive in the same first-quarter time frame.

Voodoo II is coming. Lock up your pocketbooks.

Half-Life crawls out of its test tube in April.

Half-Life Slips to April

In October, Sierra said Half-Life would make it out of the laboratory during the first quarter of 1998. Strictly speaking, Valve is mailing gold masters to production on March 31, with copies of the game making it to store shelves during the second week of April. A playable demo is scheduled for release in February. That's if all goes as planned for the Quake-engine shooter.

TEN Gulps Java

Despite the fact that the service has been touting the strengths of its proprietary interface for more than a year, TEN is moving to an open Java-based network interface. The Java version, called TEN 2.0, will undergo live tests through the beginning of 1998—operating side-by-side with TEN 1.2. At that time, the service says, all new games will go solely to TEN 2.0. The claimed benefits of shifting to Java include less installation overhead, smaller and faster updates, and simpler navigation. On the downside, Java-based network software isn't as dedicated to the mission of playing games, leaving browser and active Java applets to draw system resources when games are entered. Java-based networks also make it easier to add more extensive, full-page advertising. —*George T. Chronis*

Lo Wang like Java.

Beware of EverQuest's dragons.

COMDEX Report

The computer industry puts out its best and brightest new goodies every November in Las Vegas at the COMDEX convention. Here's the hotlist of what was on display for gamers.

Advent Returns

Not much has been heard from Advent in the game-speaker wars, but all that's changing this year with the release of four new sets of AV speakers. At the low end are two-piece and three-piece 20-watt systems, the AV280 and the AV190. The AV290 takes performance up to 70 watts, including a 40-watt downfiring subwoofer that can be wall-mounted or attached under a desk. The AV390PL adds hardware support for Aureal's A3D positional audio and Dolby ProLogic surround sound. Special controls to alter the characteristics of game audio are also included.

Forzando...funny name, good speakers?

MidiLand Deals a New Set

Maybe it's supposed to rhyme with crescendo, but MidiLand is naming its latest speaker system Forzando. The $39.95 Forzando I is a 10-watt pair of speakers with a frequency response of 150Hz~18kHz±3dB. The 28-watt Forzando II will set you back $59.95 and features a frequency response of 100Hz~18K.5Hz±3dB. Both speaker sets can be run with a 20-watt $49.95 subwoofer that features a master controller volume, crossover, and input sensitivity.

Aureal Broadens A3D Arsenal

An enhanced Vortex audio chipset is in the works. Aureal has already announced its new AU8820 chipset (see last month's Technobabble), intended for PCI audio cards that feature legacy Sound Blaster support in addition to A3D positional audio.

Since the Vortex AU8820 relies on MMX to get most of its A3D performance, Aureal says it's targeting the chipset at motherboard and OEM audio card makers who sell to new computer makers. The Vortex AU8830—which delivers full A3D regardless of MMX—is being readied for the retail market, though Aureal doesn't expect retail Vortex cards to ship before summer. Games that have been recently added to the list of titles supporting A3D include Trespasser, Battlezone, and SiN.

Trespasser will roar with A3D.

Accelerated CD-ROM Drives

That's right, 24x CD-ROM drives weren't around for very long. Like every other component in your computer, 24x drives are being eclipsed by faster siblings—in this case, 32x drives.

Mitsumi, Toshiba, Teac, Pioneer, LG Electronics, and Hitachi all have 32x models ready to ship in early 1998. The Mitsumi FX320S, Pioneer DR-504S, LG Electronics CRD-8320B, and the Teac CD-532E should already be on store shelves by the time you read this. Toshiba's and Hitachi's drives shouldn't be far behind, and all will street for well under $200.

But before you start spitting on your 10x or 12x drive, speed ratings are not all what they seem. True, 32x drives will definitely spin that fast while reading a disc's outer tracks, but when reading tracks further in, their speeds often degrade to 14x.

Better news is that all the major CD-ROM–drive makers are spending more time sourcing quieter drive motors and reducing irritating vibration. So if you're considering a faster replacement, do it for your ears.

32x CD-ROM drives are taking over.

Hercules Thrills Rendition

Diamond's Rendition Vérité 2100–based Stealth II is getting rave reviews (see Technobabble, this issue). The 2100 is a less expensive version of the 2200, which is finally getting its first retail test in Hercules' new Thriller 3D accelerator. The board can be installed in either a PCI or AGP slot, sports 4MB of SGRAM, supports OpenGL, and comes with video-in and video-out connectors. Like previous Vérité boards, the Thriller is a 2D/3D card compatible with Rendition-ready games such as Hexen II and VQuake, as well as with Direct3D games.

ViewSonic Makes Room

Desktop space is always a scarce commodity. That's led ViewSonic to take a knife to its monitor line. The end result is a rear case that's three inches smaller than before. Two truncated monitors have been announced: the 17-inch GS771 and the 19-inch PS790. ViewSonic says the GS771 should street near $590, while its larger sibling will cost less than $1,000.

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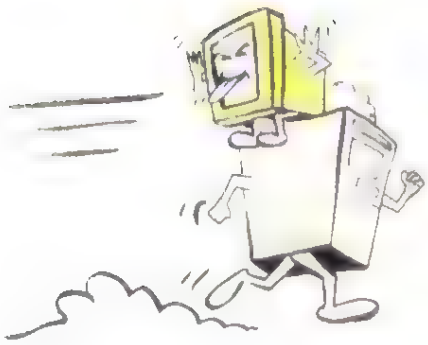

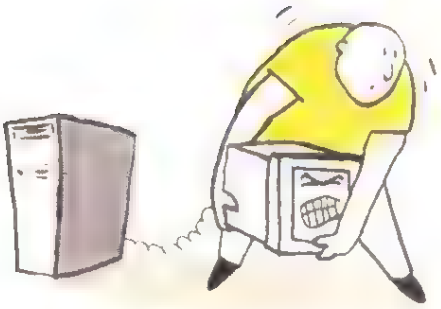

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FALCON NORTHWEST
COMPUTER SYSTEMS

COMDEX Report cont.

Matrox Busts $100 3D Barrier

Looking to gain favor with gamers who lust after 3D acceleration but aren't sure how to pay for it, Matrox has released its m3D accelerator at a low street price of $99. Based on the same PowerVR PCX2 chipset powering VideoLogic's Apocalypse 3Dx, the m3D boasts 4MB of SDRAM and delivers performance similar to the 3Dx (see Technobabble, November 1997). Matrox's add-on works in conjunction with an existing 2D card. The package includes a full version of Ultim@te Race, plus 20 demos of such games as Hexen II, Tomb Raider, Wipe-Out XL, and Moto Racer GP. A $10 coupon good toward the purchase of Hexen II is also included.

Gateway $1,999 Pentium IIs

The folks at Gateway 2000 believe in Pentium IIs for the masses. The South Dakota–based build-to-order computer maker wants to make a big splash in PII sales and is offering a 233MHz system for $1,999.

Included with the E-3110 233 are 32MB of RAM, 512K of L2 cache, a 4GB ultra DMA hard drive, an 8MB AGP video card, a 17-inch monitor, a 24x CD-ROM drive, and a LAN card.

No, it's *supposed* to look like that.

Caught in a Vortex

Interact's Vortex3D joystick, no relation to the Vortex A3D mentioned above, looks like something inspired by an art director of some sci-fi flick. The grip is suspended from a stationary base, and the stick comes with 17 programmable buttons. Why the upside down format should be any more 3D than the traditional joystick is unclear. Stay tuned for a review.

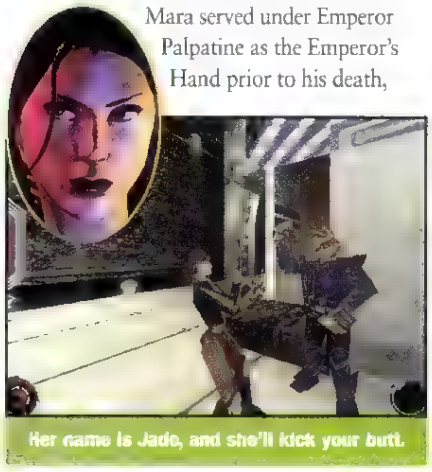
—George T. Chronis

Jedi Knight Expansion Disc Coming!

Just before press time, *PC Games* received an urgent message from a staff Jedi out in the field. It read, "LucasArts is preparing an expansion disc for Jedi Knight called Mysteries of the Sith, and it should be out in February."

The Jedi was under duress from Imperial forces but managed to send another missive, a somewhat garbled transmission, from which we were able to decipher the following:

Mysteries of the Sith will feature a new character to play: Mara Jade. Mara served under Emperor Palpatine as the Emperor's Hand prior to his death, and she was ordered to kill Luke Skywalker. Instead, she rebelled against her Imperial upbringing and decided to fight for the New Republic. When the Emperor died, Mara lost her Force powers but slowly regained them through the mentoring of Luke Skywalker and Kyle Katarn.



Her name is Jade, and she'll kick your butt.

Mysteries of the Sith will focus on Mara's reemergence into the Force and her key role in the New Republic's struggle against the Galactic Empire.

Along with Mara, you'll get a bevy of new weapons with which to deal destruction to the Dark Side:

Carbonite Gun

Shoots carbonite freeze pellets.

BlasTech BH-35 Electroscope

Used to pick off enemies at long range.

Repeating Blaster Cannon

A stationary heavy-firepower weapon.

Seeker Rail Detonators

Seeker ammo for the Rail Detonator.

Flash Bombs

Blinding grenades.

Imperial pilots are a new enemy.

Remote Sequencers

Self-explanatory, don't ya think?

That's not all: you'll also get five new Force Powers: Force Push, Chain Lightning, Saber Throw, Force Projection, and Far Sight.

Mysteries' well-developed storyline will unfold over the course of its 14 new single-player levels. The new locales include the Rebel base under attack, the interior of an Imperial asteroid, a Katrasii Space Port, a Rebel Escort ship, a swamp, and the Sith Temple.

Among the new characters to battle are the Rancor Monster (from Jabba's Palace in *Return of the Jedi*), Vornskrs (from Timothy Zahn's books), Ysalamiri (force-negating

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Trek Shooter cont.

to defeat Borg personal shields, which quickly adapt to the energy signature of phasers.

Solo players will have to complete at least 10 mission episodes in the game. Each mission will increase in difficulty and responsibility and have a different specialized goal. You get to jump into one of the *TNG* characters, with a different character leading each mission team. The game's AI will control the actions of other *TNG* team members, but players give mission-specific orders, such as attack and support. If the

Captain Picard still looks pretty good in SVGA.

player's character is killed or assimilated by the Borg, that player jumps to another *TNG* character on the team. If the entire team is eliminated, the mission restarts.

Much less has been finalized for multiplayer deathmatch options. Although it's likely that all single-player maps will be available for multiplayer duty, the number of dedicated deathmatch maps is still uncertain. *Trek* fans can expect some variation of a "red-shirt" holodeck training simulation that would pit different Federation teams against each other. Also yet to be finalized are the characters available for multiplay. The use of actors' likenesses requires permission by both the stars themselves and Paramount, so approvals were still pending at press time. *Trek* fans salivating at the prospect of a "Wesley Crusher Thon" shouldn't get their hopes up, says Mancuso.

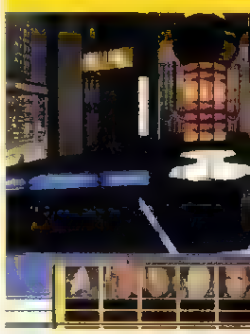
Use of cast likenesses is also resulting in a major change in the Unreal engine. While Unreal's characters are polygonal, Visionary and MicroProse quickly settled on Voxel technology for rendering First Contact's characters, because "polygonal characters didn't come close enough to looking like the real thing," according to Mancuso.

Expect Captain Picard, Cmdr. Riker, Lt. Cmdr. Data, Lt. Cmdr. LaForge, Lt. Worf, and Counselor Troi to be available in the game. As for the Borg, players will have to deal with fighter, engineer, and assimilator drones. The resurrected Borg queen will also make an appearance. Mancuso says the assimilators will be especially troublesome—hiding in corners and shadows, waiting for an opportunity to spring from behind and assimilate players.

Another deviation from the Unreal engine is the addition of a mouse-accessible control window to the screen interf
some item-management and
tion features couldn't be real
fans won't have to worry: A
be available to switch the mo
between screen interface and

As for 3D video accelera
Voodoo Glide, Direct3D, a
assured, though direct supp
hardware is up in the air. S

**Working from original
Enterprise-E has been fa
for First Con**



support Aureal's A3D audi
Contact will as well.

Base requirements will b
32MB of RAM. The high R
was set primarily in anticipa
memory needs.

Jedi cont.

lizards from Zahn's books), Dianoga (from Shadows of the Empire), Swamp Wampa, an Ithorian (Hammerhead), a Torture Droid, a TIE pilot, and an Assassin Droid. Rebel soldiers and officers will also be around to lend a helping hand, and it sounds like you'll need it!

If JK had a weak link, it was its limited number of multiplayer maps. Mysteries should rectify this with 15 new ones: 10 are deathmatch levels and five are for the new Kill the Fool with the Ysalamiri (think Kill the Fool with the Chicken from Outlaws). You'll also be able to do battle with three new multiplayer personas: a Rebel/Imperial soldier, a bounty hunter, and a Scout (sniper/spy).

The game engine is also being enhanced to include cameras and security systems, colored

lighting in hardware, and ta

End transmission.

Sadly, at this point, all c
with the *PC Games* Jedi, b
courage. Stay tuned for mo
the field...

...e-Game Connection

Compiled by Danny W. Lam

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Westwood's Blade Runner site

www.bladerunner.com

News, sounds, and pics galore for this new adventure Nice job Westwood

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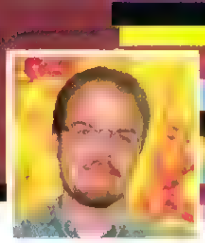
THE PLAYER



STEVE KLETT

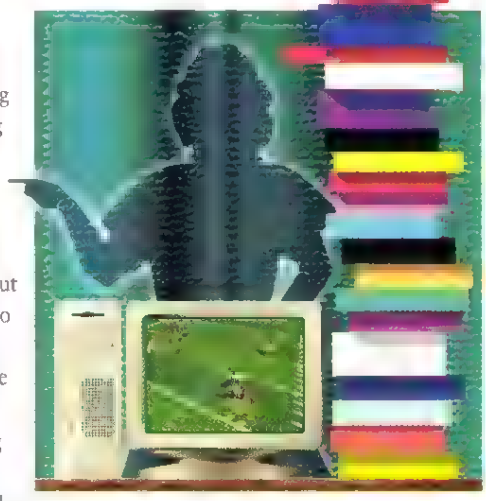
What could be better than getting sent all sorts of games for free and writing about them?

To Be a Game Reviewer

It seems like only yesterday that The Player was sitting in his living room on a positively lovely New England day, playing Intellivision Football with a pal, for like the hundredth day in a row. His Mom would come in every so often and comment: "It's so nice, you boys should go outside—videogames won't get you anywhere in life."

Now, roughly 15 years later, it's a positively lovely California day, and The Player sits in his *PC Games* office playing Madden 98 on the PC. His Mom no longer tells him games won't get him anywhere in the real world—but she still tells him to go outside more often.

Why is The Player revealing details of his childhood? Well, lately he's been getting volumes of mail from readers wanting to know how he got a job writing for a game magazine, and how they should go about doing the same. What could be better than getting sent all sorts of games for free and writing about them?



So how do you get into the game-review business? There's no sure-fire formula, but working on your writing skills as much as your game-playing is a good start. Be well-rounded: read a lot, be up on current events, world history, and science. Yes, it's important to be into games, be good at games, and be knowledgeable about PCs—but there are lots of people who fit that profile. There aren't nearly as many who can do all the above, write well, and write with insight. Game magazines are almost always looking for good, dependable, enthusiastic, well-educated writers. Be respectful, be professional—don't send letters filled with typos asking for work—and be persistent.

The Player's favorite subject in school was English—he's loved to write for as long as he can remember. And he's been gaming since the debut of the Apple II, Pong, Atari, Intellivision, Nintendo, Genesis, Super Nintendo, Sega CD (yes, The Player's a bit of a sucker when it comes to the latest gaming gadgetry), 3DO (see?), Atari Jaguar (any doubt now?), IBM PC, PlayStation, and N64. And yes, he put all of the above on his résumé—and you should, too. You'd be surprised how many résumés *PC Games* receives from applicants who don't ever mention games.

As he came to the end of his college career, The Player took the time to research his favorite gaming publications and put together professional résumés geared to each one. He bought new games, reviewed them in each magazine's style, and sent them to each mag's respective editor. Persistence eventually paid off, and the rest, as they say, is history.

That said, The Player would like to clear up some misconceptions about his profession. It isn't always as rosy as you might think. Like anything you enjoy, once you start getting paid for it, it isn't always as much fun as it used to be. Playing Jedi Knight for 10 straight hours because you want to is a blast; playing Jedi for 10 straight hours because of a deadline somehow isn't as enjoyable.

The Player must also note that game critics don't just play games all day. He can't speak for all game-mag editors, but The Player knows lots of them and how they spend their time. Most of the day—the normal working hours of 9 to 5—is spent doing the more mundane but necessary parts of the job: editing; planning future issues; assigning stories; niggling with freelancers; talking with placid, scorned, and disgruntled vendors; enduring countless demos of games that clearly stink; and cranking through the multitudes of corporate-type tasks that come with, well, working for a big publishing company. The game playing often doesn't even start until everyone else is on the way out the door to go home, or out for a beer, or a movie—you know, life stuff.

And then you can't necessarily play the game you want to; often you have to play the game you need to review. The game you really want to play most that day goes into a pile next to your PC. Pretty soon, that pile reaches to the ceiling. (No, The Player won't send them to you!) Sure, you get to play lots of games, but you don't get to play a lot of any particular game very often.

But hey, no need to break out the violin for a Player-pity party. There are plenty of times that make it all worthwhile: like when The Player gets to play games like Jedi Knight and Tomb Raider II in their finished glory before they're available to the general public. [Snicker.]

The Player's final advice to those wishing to break into game writing: Don't just be in it for free games (and definitely not for the money), and do expect to lose a lot of your life to the computer screen. Oh, and go outside once in a while—the real world's pretty entertaining, too, if you give it half a chance. And it'll make your Mom happy.

The Player's gotta go now...Lara Croft and Tomb Raider II are calling...

Send your review of a new game to ThePlayer@pcgames.com. Who knows—you might just see it in print...and you might receive a free game from The Player.

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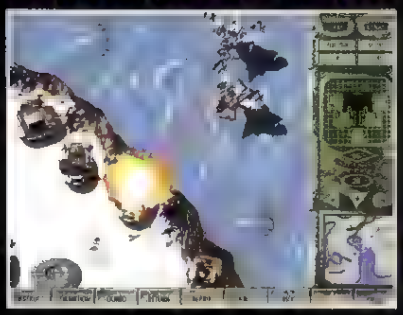

ZOOM IN, THEN ZOOM OUT.
(When it's too painful to watch.)

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THE OPPONENT

BLADE

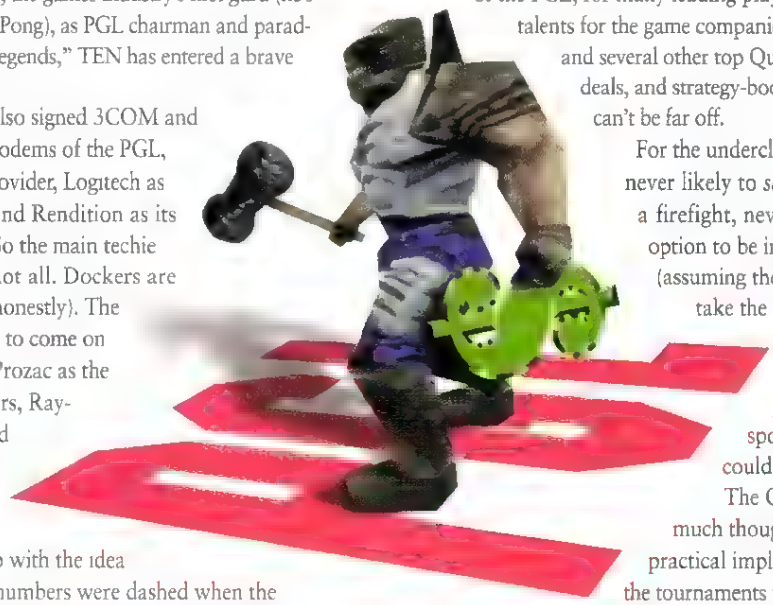
I want to be a pro Quake-boy

Play to Earn, Pay to Watch

Hearty back-slapping, nods, smiles, and boundless enthusiasm from the marketing department—an online-gaming service is pleased with itself. Are they the first such company to ever post a profit? Have ad agencies suddenly decided to buy in bulk in the online world? Has Congress decreed that all new games must come with an online multiplayer component—and be available to everyone? None of the above. The *real* reason for the ebullience is potentially more scary than any of those: the launch of Total Entertainment Network's AMD-sponsored Professional Gamers League.

Wheeling out Nolan Bushnell, the games industry's first guru (he's popularly credited with creating Pong), as PGL chairman and parading a variety of online-gaming "legends," TEN has entered a brave new frontier. And this is serious.

Alongside AMD, TEN has also signed 3COM and U.S. Robotics as the Official Modems of the PGL, GTE as its Official Network Provider, Logitech as its Official Game Controller, and Rendition as its Official Graphics Technology. So the main techie bases are covered. But that's not all. Dockers are the Official Pants of the PGL (honestly). The Opponent is expecting No-Doz to come on board as the Official Pick-Up, Prozac as the Official Drug of Defeated Players, Ray-Ban as the Official Eyewear, and Rent-a-Date as the Official... well, maybe not.



But sponsorship is the key. Rumors that TEN came up with the idea in order to increase subscriber numbers were dashed when the company let anyone enter for $9.95 a season. The bottom line is that sponsors pay to be sponsors. And TEN needed to be paid by someone.

So this *is* serious. And The Opponent is impressed. With over 1,200 people registering to take part in qualifying for the first Quake tournament (C&C: Red Alert is the other game that's being played competitively this inaugural season), interest is certainly there. But is there really money to be made? Can playing Quake become a spectator sport? Bizarrely enough, The Opponent thinks it can. TEN's new technology—which allows spectators in games and recordings of games to be shown on big screens—opens up a tremendous amount of promotional opportunity.

At press time, the PGL is a concept without a specified future, words with little substance, full of uncertainty with regard to any of the *practical* considerations. Is the ranking system really robust enough to guarantee that the 128 players who make the cut are really the best? And does any of it really matter, when everyone knows that Thresh is going to walk away with the top prize?

The Opponent asked Cabalist, who was ranked number six in the PGL at press time, why he joined. "Just for the fun," he said. "There's some decent cash and prizes up for grabs, but I certainly don't plan on making a living out of this."

A $7,500 first-place prize is not to be taken lightly (Hey, Thresh may be able to insure his Ferrari for that!), especially when it's backed by an AMD K6 PC and other sponsor-provided prizes. A top-16 finish will net $100, which isn't going to make people quit jobs, but this is just the beginning.

So Michael Jordan–like contracts are some way off, but the purpose of the PGL, for many leading players, seems to be to showcase talents for the game companies. Already Thresh, KillCreek, and several other top Quake players have sponsorship deals, and strategy-book deals and consultant work can't be far off.

For the underclass—the thousands of gamers never likely to *see* a Thresh or Bitterboy in a firefight, never mind kill him—just the option to be in the same arena is appealing (assuming their egos are strong enough to take the beating). But will that interest last? Is the inaugural season of the PGL an exciting prelude to a new Olympic sport? It's scary to think that it could be.

The Opponent just hopes that as much thought and, more importantly, practical implementation have gone into the tournaments themselves as have evidently gone into sponsor-acquisition and marketing. It'd be a crying shame for this great idea to fall apart due to technical glitches or administrative screw-ups.

The Opponent sees the key to success as the way in which those thousands of "not-quite-good-enoughs" get enough encouragement to keep being "not-quite-good-enough," while the few top stars take the plaudits and the prizes. Sure, competition will up the competition. Let's face it: Thresh's first kosher defeat will be the talk of the entire Quake community—but that's going to take awhile.

Kudos to TEN for giving the idea a plausible, potentially profitable grounding through sponsors and marketing. The talk has been impressive. Just make sure you deliver the goods, for the gamers' sakes.

PCG_Blade won't be in the first tournament—he'd hate to steal the limelight from the host of other top players. Send comments to blade@pcgames.com.

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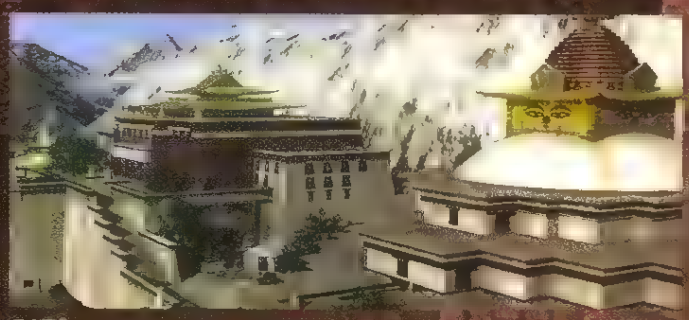

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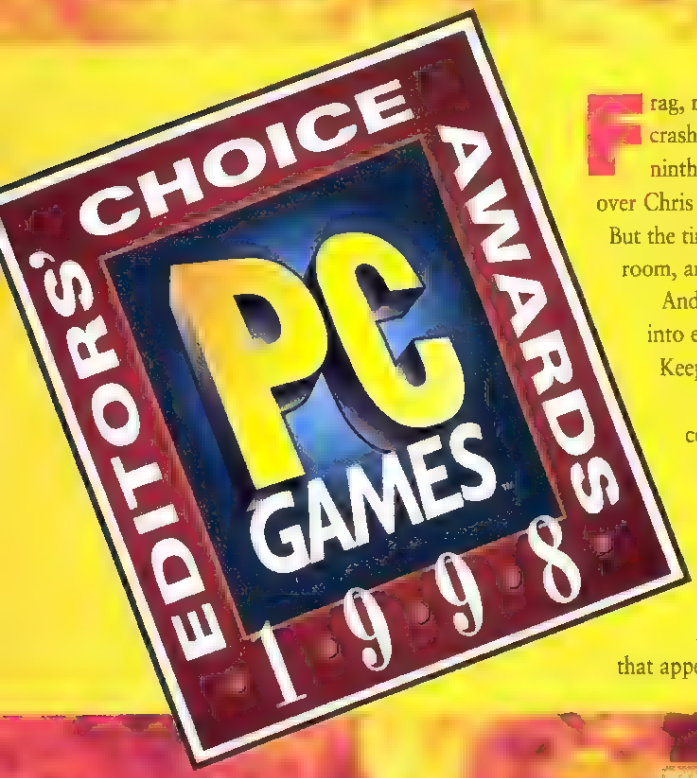

By the *PC Games* Staff

Frag, race, quest, conquer, gib, explore, firebomb, cruise, battle, snipe, drive, score, crash, slay, throw the TD bomb to Rice, disarm your foe with Force Pull, eagle the ninth hole, take the hairpin turn at 100 mph, bum rush the base with tanks, dunk over Chris Webber, rocket-jump to the red armor—we've done it all over the past year. But the time had come to lay down our controllers, lock ourselves in a poorly ventilated room, and fight about the *PC Games* Editors' Choice Awards.

And fight we did—contentious, hard-fought battles that occasionally degenerated into editors swearing like *South Park* brats, smacking each other like Dungeon Keeper imps, and being fired and rehired as many times as a Yankees manager.

This is, after all, serious business. If we're hypin' it here, it delivers—on all counts. Nothing in the Editors' Choice Awards is in the "Eh, you might wanna check it out if you like that sorta thing" category. Everything is in the "Fool, if you haven't played this, you can't call yourself a gamer" class. We even eliminated a bunch of categories this year because, well, frankly, there just wasn't a title (or person) in them that deserved to be on our A-List of A-Lists.

What you won't see: Best Sim, Best Brain Drain, Best FMV, Best Actor, Best Actress. What you will see: the absolute best games, hardware, and accessories that appeared in our January 1997 to December 1997 issues.

GAME OF THE YEAR

Jedi Knight *(LucasArts)*

Plans for the Dark Forces sequel were ambitious. We expected a solid story, and we knew Dark Forces II would have multiplayer capabilities. Then we heard whispers about using the lightsaber and the Force for good or evil, and we snickered. How can you have interesting battles with a lightsaber? How can Force Powers work in a first-person action game? Man, I hope they don't screw up *Star Wars*...

Silly, silly, silly us. LucasArts unleashed an absolutely breathtaking masterpiece of a game. It has it all—innovative gameplay, excellent multiplayer options, a good story, rich graphics, a wonderful soundtrack (perfectly timed to heighten drama), and lushly detailed, gorgeous, massive levels. There's immersive, and then there's Jedi. One editor said he'd never felt so small in a first-person shooter. The sheer scope, depth, and detail of the environments (the stars and a distant planet twinkling in the distance over the cavern; a one-mile freefall between buildings; the whistling wind giving way to the thunder of TIE fighters buzzing overhead; stormtroopers chatting before noticing your presence; droids getting in your way as they go about their daily work) make you feel like just one being with a mission in an infinite, living universe.

It's as good as gaming gets.

BEST ACTION GAME

Jedi Knight *(LucasArts)*

A clean sweep for Jedi—it's both our Game of the Year and our Action Game of the Year.

BREAKTHROUGH GAME

Tomb Raider *(Eidos Interactive)*

Nothing did as much as Tomb Raider to lift the games industry out of the doldrums. It was the first megahit on both the console and PC, it beautifully showed off the power of 3D-accelerated graphics when that technology was still pretty new, and it was the first hit to feature a strong femme who kicks some serious ass. Oh, and did we mention she's the biggest, best polygonal babe ever? Lara Croft has launched a thousand fan sites and become a symbol for the industry.

BEST MULTIPLAYER GAME

Quake *(id Software)*

Quake? How can a game more than a year old get our award this year? Quake is still fresh and growing because it's everything an online game should be. It's infinitely expandible via a (relatively) easy-to-learn programming language that has facilitated magnificent mods like Capture the Flag, Team Fortress, and PainKeep. It's infinitely social via an ever-growing community of clans, dedicated servers and Web sites, IRC channels, and Internet newscasts. And it's infinitely playable via its easy-to-learn but tough-to-master gameplay. We're still playing tons of multiplayer Quake, and so are thousands of you on hundreds of servers and online-gaming services around the world.

BEST SINGLE-PLAYER GAME

MDK *(Playmates Interactive)*

With an acronym that stands for Murder Death Kill, you expect an all-action blast. And that's exactly what Shiny delivered with this stunning title. Blending cutting-edge technology, innovative and original gameplay, a wacky sense of humor, and an endless supply of bullets, MDK was easily one of the most engrossing games of the year.

Incredible monster AI and animations—they help their comrades, limp, howl, and even sneeze in the snow—add real character to the inventive level designs. The sniper helmet you have to master adds a

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FOX INTERACTIVE

whole new skew to the action genre, as every nook and cranny of every level can be scoped out. MDK's blend of nonstop action and strategy places it among the greatest single-player games ever.

BEST REAL-TIME STRATEGY GAME

Dungeon Keeper (Bullfrog)

It's good to be bad; and it was never better to be bad than in Peter Molyneux's adieu to Bullfrog, the groundbreaking development house he formed and led. Being pitched into the role of arch bad guy with the task of populating a dungeon with all manner of evil was in itself appealing. Dungeon Keeper gave this task a style and panache that elevated the experience way beyond what was typical of the real-time-strategy market.

Pandering to the needs and whims of hordes of evil beasts—and handing out your own discipline with a swift imp-slap to up their work rate—added tremendous fun to the complex tasks encapsulated in the missions.

The good guys didn't stand a chance with DK's detailed AI and the option to zap into the first-person view of any creature. Original, engaging, and challenging, Dungeon Keeper takes the coveted strategy crown with an evil grin and devilish bow.

Runner-up: Age of Empires (Microsoft)

BEST TURN-BASED STRATEGY GAME

Steel Panthers II: Modern Battles

Few computer games offered fans of their genre a more comprehensive and replayable package than Steel Panthers II. SSI's Gary Grigsby crafted a complete retrospective of modern conventional warfare, starting with the Korean War and ending with a peek forward at speculative campaigns of our very near future. Giving players access to practically every fighting unit in the world's arsenal,

and with a scenario/campaign designer that allows all of it to be sculpted, SPII will be engaging strategists for a long time to come.

Runner-up: Over the Reich (BigTime Software)

BEST ADVENTURE GAME

Dark Earth (Microl

Forget the postcard-'n'-puzzle snoozers of yore. Dark Earth showed how to do an adventure game right. It's got a rich and detailed environment, a genuinely awesome combat system, characters as three-dimensional as their polygons, dynamic interaction with NPCs, and genuinely stunning plot twists revealed by gameplay, rather than plain exposition. Dark Earth is an inspired production that delivers the epic vision of designer Nicholas Gaume from the French company Kalisto.

Runner-up: Last Express (Red Orb)

BEST RPG

Diablo (Blizz

RPGers eschew Diablo's real-time combat. Action gamers sniff at Diablo's RPG elements. Neither camp is willing to claim it as its own—until they play it. Diablo is a beautifully dark, moody, engaging, wonderfully clever action game of an RPG, or RPG of an action game, chock full of enough fighting and gore to satisfy frag-

Command & Conquer™
Dark Reign™
Uprising™
Total Annihilation™

What Do These Games Have In Common?

gers and enough character development, spells, and resource management to keep role players interested. Diablo might not be a "pure" RPG, but it's the most innovative, captivating, genre-bending dungeon delving to be had this year.

BEST FLIGHT SIM

Flying Corps
(Empire Interactive)

Flying Corps ain't perfect—it's plagued with a few minor bugs and a handicapped viewing system. But its blemishes are quickly and easily forgotten once you jump into the cockpit of any one of its six exquisitely modeled WWI aircraft.

Its graphics, flight models, and AI (this is one flight sim in which the computer pilots pose a significant challenge) make it the definitive WWI flight sim—and the best flight sim put out last year, hands down.

Empire also deserves kudos for including historically accurate maps and a pilot's handbook. Flying Corps vets and newcomers should check out the recently released Flying Corps Gold, which adds the Fokker D-VII, multiplay, a mission editor, and 3D-accelera tion support to the original game. (See our review next issue.)

BEST DRIVING SIM

NASCAR Racing 2 (Papyrus)

Racing fans who'd contented themselves with arcade-style games that owed more to Pole Position than to America's most popular spectator sport rejoiced over NASCAR 2. A complex and detailed simulation of the NASCAR racing experience, this game is nonetheless easy to learn and rewarding to master. Real racing buffs—those who appreciate the difference that a slight change in tire pressure can make to a driver's success—found four-wheeled nirvana in this package.

NASCAR 2 is first to the finish line in racing sims and has set the standard by which all others are judged.

BEST COMBAT SIM

688(I) Hunter/Killer
(Jane's Combat Simulations)

Jane's just keeps making better and better games, and none of its 1997 releases was more addictive than 688(I). In simulating the operation and battle patrol of a premier US Navy missile submarine, it'd be easy to imagine this becoming more complex than a gamer could handle. Not the case. In fact, 688(I) is that rare sim that's easy to learn in simple advancing steps and is fun to play the whole way through. Whether you're requisitioning more lunch meat from the base commissary or configuring a Tomahawk cruise-missile attack on foreign shores, 688(I) is a riveting simulation of modern sub warfare.

BEST SPORTS GAME

NHL 98 (Electronic Arts)

From the rollicking intro to the Stanley Cup presentation, this is as slick and realistic as a sports game gets. It truly feels like you're on the ice bodychecking, screening the goalie, going for the deflection, and arguing with the refs after a penalty. NHL 98 has everything from the obviously necessary (excellent control of beautifully rendered, polygonal players) to the subtly evocative (the ping when a shot hits the post, the slamming door when entering the penalty box, well-timed play-by-play),

EDITORS' FAVORITE THINGS FROM '97

We all have our particular peccadilloes and tastes, and here's a sampling of what got us amped in 1997.

- After all the wait, anticipation, hype, and expectation, discovering that Jedi Knight was everything we hoped it would be. *—Rob Smith, Senior Reviews Editor*
- My favorite gaming development of 1997 was the proliferation of online/multiplayer gaming guilds. This was the first year that guilds from all types of games—first-person shooters, RPGs, mechs, car sims, real-time wargames, sports games—really exploded onto the Web. It's the development that the PC was waiting for, and its growth will be what sets the computer-gaming experience far apart from the console realm. *—Daniel Morris, Editor at Large*
- Jedi, running on my P200 with a 3Dfx card and the Monster Sound card for 3D audio—volume real loud—is hands down the greatest PC gaming experience I've ever had. (The neighbors weren't as pleased, however.) *—Steve Klett, Editor in Chief*
- My fave thing to look at is Niki from SegaSoft's upcoming Vigilance; my fave thing to use is a tie between the BoPeep spell (Hexen II) and Force Pull (Jedi Knight); and my fave person to cheap kill is The Player. *—George Chronis, News & Technology Editor*
- First, Quake revolutionized first-person shooters. Then 3Dfx revolutionized graphics. Combine the two, throw in easy multiplay over the Internet, and you have my absolute favorite thing this year: multiplayer GLQuake over the Net. *—Willem Knibbe, Features Editor*
- The return of third-person gaming! With titles like Tomb Raider and MDK reminding us that, yes, you can have a great action game that's not first-person, the future's looking good for the over-the-shoulder, I-like-to-look-at-myself genre. And with compelling characters like Red Lotus (Eidos' Deathtrap Dungeon) and Messiah (the namesake in Shiny's forthcoming title) on their way, we'll want to keep on looking. *—Corey Cohen, Associate Managing Editor*

Quake mod is a blast in both modes, with 11 awesome levels and graphics. And we never thought we'd have so much fun in a cooperative multiplayer game. Peering down that dark hall with your buddy guarding your back, just knowing an alien is going to attack at any second, made the hairs on our neck stand up. Alas, we'd love to say it's on our CD, but *Alien* rights-holders 20th Century Fox got their panties in a bunch and forced the creators to pull the mod. We're hoping the Fox folks have a change of heart so that this mod can undergo a Resurrection soon.

making it not only the best sports game this year, but possibly the best sports game ever.

BEST ONLINE-ONLY GAME

WarBirds 2.0 *(iMagic Online*

iMagic Online (formerly Interactive Creations continues to update and polish its online WWII flight sim. WarBirds allows up to 200 pilots to wage war at once over the Internet. The WarBirds universe is persistent, so there's always a game to be had no matter what time of day you log on. And the community spirit and level of camaraderie among its players are among the highest of any online game. Best of all, though, the game performs well over ordinary phone lines and even low-end (14.4) modems.

iMagic Online has added support for 3D terrain, new planes, and general improvements with the release of WarBirds 2.0—and 3D acceleration support should be available by the time you read this. Thus, WarBirds stays technically current in the world of online games and continues to provide a thrilling air-combat experience—earning it this award for a second straight year.

BEST COMMERCIAL ADD-ON

Scourge of Armagon, Quake Mission Pack 1

Ritual Entertainment

Scourge of Armagon did more than add an awesome set of new monsters and weapons to Quake. Sure, Ritual Entertainment (formerly Hipnotic Interactive) did that, but it also added color and depth to the levels. You get broad vistas, a nice feeling of wide-open space, and colors that go beyond Quake's brown/green/purple palette. All in all, it was a stellar debut product and a required add-on for Quake players at any level.

Runner-up: Lords of the Realm II Siege Pack (Sierra On-Line)

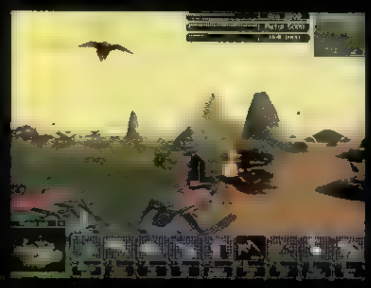
BEST USER MAP/MOD

Alien Quake

John Diamond, Gustav Taxen, and Dave Wallin

This year's new category was one of the most hotly debated. The latest versions of Capture the Flag and Team Fortress are amazingly addictive and thorough. PainKeep is as professional as can be. Several Duke maps showed top-notch innovation. Finally, Alien Quake got the nod because it was both single- and multiplayer. This

They're Missing Something.



The war begins February 1998

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BEST ART

Dark Earth (MicroProse)

Every screen of the vast adventure epic Dark Earth is a stunning work of art. The neo-Gothic architecture of the decaying future, the moody torch lighting of a city without electricity, and the incredibly lifelike movement of the 3D characters combine to make it a visually arresting game from opening frame to final cinematic. But best of all, Dark Earth's astounding visuals aren't static—it's all playable, explorable, and usable. The detail level is so high that polygonal rats scurry through basements. Everything affects gameplay and is designed to draw the player deeper into the adventure—and it succeeds brilliantly.

Runner-up: Riven (Red Orb)

BEST SOUNDTRACK

I-76 (Activision)

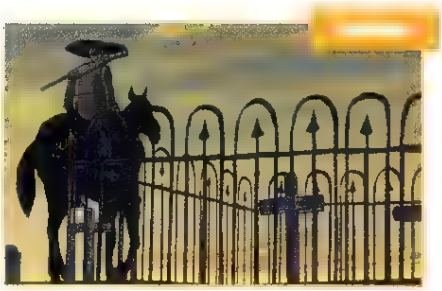
I-76's tunes were completely original and thoroughly, joyfully funky. The game, essentially MechWarrior in '70s muscle cars, plopped you right in the middle of 1976, and Arion Salazare's music (he wrote it, Bullmark performed it) made you believe you were there.

Runner-up: Jedi Knight (LucasArts)

BEST STORY

Outlaws (LucasArts)

A first-person shooter winning in a category normally reserved for fantastical graphic adventures? Outlaws' epic spaghetti-Western tale had us on the edge of our seats. We cared as much about what happened and what was



going to happen as we did about reloading our six-shooters to off some black-clad bad guys. LucasArts did Sergio Leone proud with this story, presented in beautifully cinematic cut-scenes.

BEST SYSTEM

Falcon Mach V (Falcon Northwest)

We had to argue about the parameters for this one—should it be restricted to prebuilt, consumer-oriented machines, or can we open it up to everyone? We opened it up, and once again we turned to Falcon Northwest Computer Systems, a relatively small company in Coos Bay, Oregon. Falcon builds each PC to order starting at $2,495, and it builds 'em for hardcore gamers. Its motherboards are the fastest in the business, and it uses only top-notch video cards, accelerators, joysticks, and other components. Falcon won this award last year, and it de-

REMEMBER THESE?

This being the 5th anniversary of our Editors' Choice Awards, we thought we'd blast into the past and check out some of the stuff we've deigned worthy in years gone by.

1992 Winners

- Best RPG—Crusaders of the Dark Savant
- Best Sports—Hardball 3
- Best Flight Sim—Falcon 3.0
- Best Strategy—Crisis in the Kremlin
- Best Action—Wolfenstein 3-D: Spear of Destiny

1993 Winners

- Best Game—X-Wing
- Best Platform—Dell Dimension XPS 466V Multimedia PC
- Breakthrough Game—The 7th Guest
- Most Promising—QSound Virtual Audio

1994 Winners

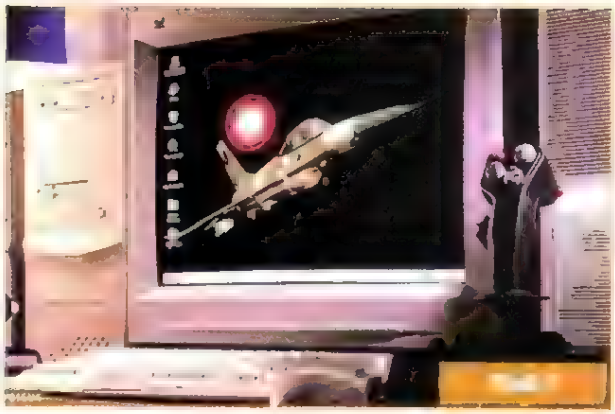
- Best Game—Doom II: Hell on Earth
- Breakthrough Game—Magic Carpet
- Best RPG—Alien Logic
- Best Strategy Game—Dominus
- Best Sim—Wolf
- Best Adventure Game—The Legend of Kyrandia Book Three: Malcolm's Revenge
- Best Online Entertainment—The Internet
- Best Game Computer—Intel P90

1995 Winners

- Best Game—MechWarrior 2
- Breakthrough Game—Phantasmagoria
- Best RPG—Stonekeep
- Best Strategy Game—Jagged Alliance
- Best Sim—Caesar II
- Best Adventure Game—Buried in Time
- Best Brain Drain—You Don't Know Jack
- Best Action Game—Terminal Velocity
- Best Action/Adventure—Crusader: No Remorse
- Breakthrough Hardware—3D accelerators

1996 Winners

- Game of the Year, Best Action Game, and Best Multiplayer Game—Duke Nukem 3D
- Breakthrough Game—Quake
- Best Real-Time Strategy—Syndicate Wars
- Best Turn-Based Strategy—Civilization II
- Best Adventure—The Pandora Directive
- Best RPG—The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall
- Best Sim—Afterlife
- Best Flight Sim—AH-64D Longbow
- Best Driving Sim—Grand Prix II
- Best Combat Sim—MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries
- Best Component—Vérité 3D Accelerator



serves it once again. Prebuilt PCs in the running included those from Micron and Intergraph—they understand that quality components make for quality machines.

BEST PERIPHERAL

Saitek Joystick/Rudder

There are always reasons a non–flight-sim gamer puts off buying high-end joysticks and rudders. Cost is one; perceived value is another. Saitek's debut X36F system doesn't deliver a technological leap up from premier sticks from CH Products and ThrustMaster, but the new kid on the block is trying hard to do better than the established competition. Saitek has succeeded in making a flight system that looks and feels substantial in your hands. The fit, finish, and workmanship make this $99 combo seem like a BMW parked next to a bunch of Dodges. With a few innovative takes on button- and rudder-placement, plus a friendly Win 95 configuration utility, Saitek has a product that will encourage gamers to get the tools they need to become seasoned pilots.

BEST COMPONENT

Pure 3D Canopus

Mmmm, 640-by-480 at 30 frames per second. 3Dfx changed gaming forever with its graphics-accelerator technology, and Canopus went the extra mile with its implementation of 3Dfx's Voodoo chipset. While every other Voodoo based board comes with 4MB of RAM, Canopus throws another 2MB of texture memory onto its board without raising the price (at press time, it's $179). If you haven't sprung for a 3D graphics accelerator yet, get this one.

BREAKTHROUGH HARDWARE

Monster Sound 3D Audio

Game audio is undergoing some radical and welcome changes. Kudos to Creative Labs for reigning supreme over the sound-card business for so long, but a new generation of PCI-based 3D audio is taking aim at the Sound Blaster citadel. The first big gun in the 3D audio wars is Diamond's Monster Sound board. An add-on that works in conjunction with your existing sound card, the Monster Sound uses Aureal's A3D format to deliver true positional audio. If you play Jedi Knight without A3D, you're really missing out on how much more immersive the game can be. With the list of A3D-supported games growing, it looks like the Monster 3D will significantly change the way we hear and enjoy games.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

SSI may not be the biggest player in the PC gaming universe, but it is definitely one of the best. With little fanfare or chest-beating, the company continues to pump out stellar

strategy games. And 1997 was a banner year for SSI, featuring the release of such quality titles as Pacific General, Panzer General II, Steel Panthers III, Ardennes Offensive, Dark Colony, and Imperialism.

Many of these games are sequels to already established favorites—but SSI deserves credit for not fixing what's not broken and continuing to improve its bread-and-butter products. SSI also gets accolades for really putting wargaming on the map with the original Panzer General—perhaps the most successful turn-based wargame of all time. You simply can't think strategy games on the PC today without thinking of SSI and its excellent games, which is why the company deserves this year's Lifetime Achievement award. ■

What did we miss? What awards do you second, and which would you have given to someone else? Send comments to pcgamesletters@pcgames.com.

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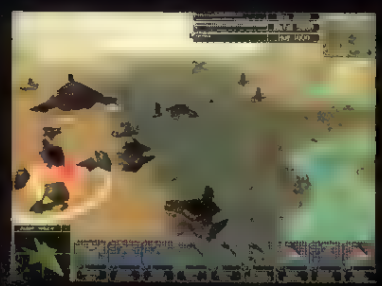

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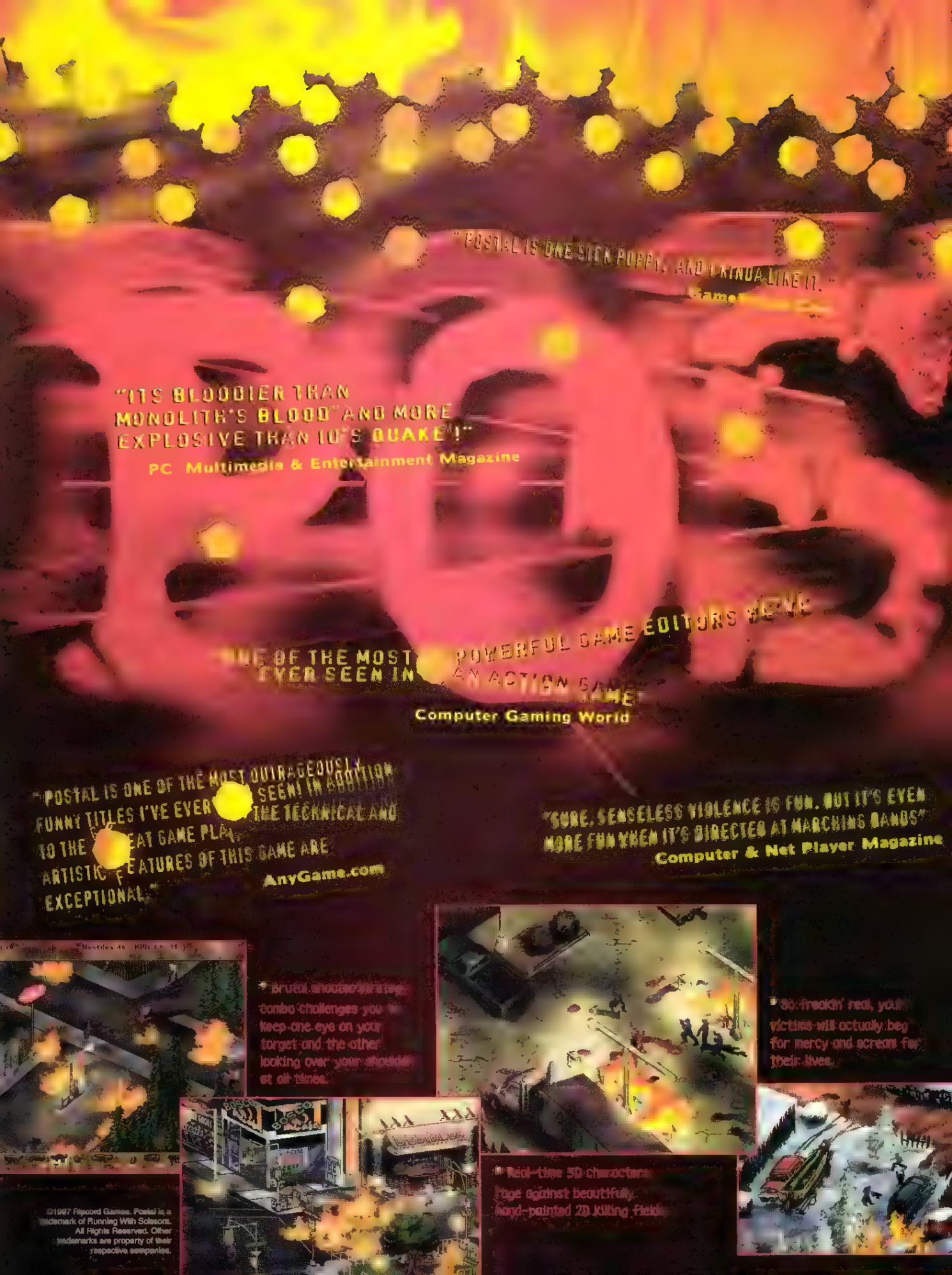
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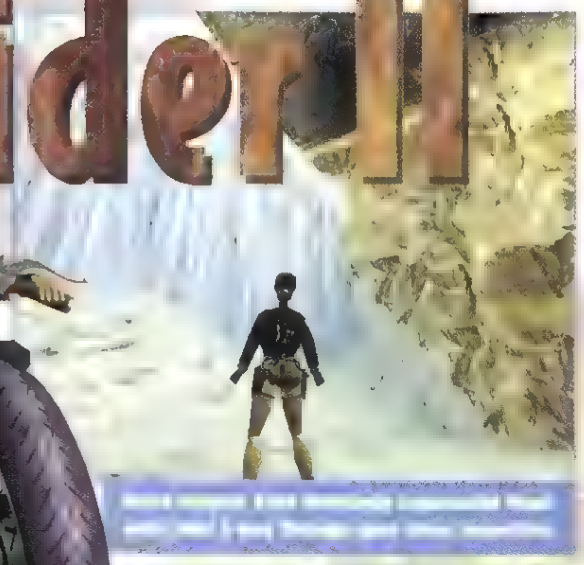
THE FALLEN LORDS

Tomb Raider II

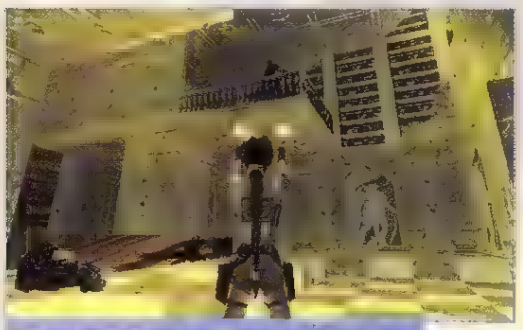
By Daniel Morris



If you cracked open the recent *Time* special issue on the 50 Most Influential People in Cyberspace, right alongside Bill Gates and George Lucas you'd have found a fictional character by the name of Lara Croft. And who could deny her? Since the release of Tomb Raider in November 1996, she's established herself as the most recognizable figure in computer gaming.

Lara's been on the cover of nearly a hundred magazines worldwide and has claimed a spot as a genuine pop-culture icon. Folks like Sonic the Hedgehog and Mario may have transcended their console titles to become figures in the mass consciousness, but Lara is the first of the PC Era to accomplish this trick. Nationally broadcast TV ads, radio spots, a Hollywood movie deal in the works—it is truly the Age of Croft.

And Eidos Interactive isn't going to let Lara's mass appeal go to waste for one second—Tomb Raider II is designed to be the breakthrough game that launches PC gaming into the entertainment mainstream.



Tomb Raider II continues the story of the English adventurer whose taste for world travel is second only to her desire to challenge the globe's most dangerous nooks and crannies in search of mystical archaeological treasures. She's Indiana Jones with a Y chromosome and a Swiss bank account. And heavy firepower.

Britain's baddest, bustiest bombshell is back

After claiming the Scion of Atlantis in the original game, Lara is put on the trail of the Dagger of Xian, a weapon said to be imbued with the power of a rampaging dragon that was unleashed on feudal China. Naturally, there are two competing concerns who want the power of the dagger for themselves, and that means there are going to be numerous bad boys looking to snag it before you do—and do whatever it takes to keep you from beating them to it.

One big change from TR to TRII is the human enemies Lara has to deal with. TR gave her only a handful of people to fight, relying instead on fauna to provide the threats to her well-being. TRII heavily ups the bipedal-baddie factor. You'll now have to get medieval on quite a few unsavory characters, as well as be a one-woman Inhumane Society when it comes to all of the game's endangered wildlife.

Gameplay in TRII is almost identical to its predecessor's, with a few interesting additions. Lara has a slightly expanded range of moves, the most immediately useful of which is the ability to climb vertically or side-to-side up any walls with grabbable surfaces. Brick walls, bookcases—your ingenuity is rewarded when you find neat ways to get up and over apparent dead-ends.

Graphical touches include a much rounder and realistic Lara, complete with a ponytail that bobs, floats, and flies as she turns corners. She's also decked out in some new duds from time to time—a bomber jacket in the cold Tibetan snow, a wet suit in the sunken ship—just to keep her in style.

The 18-level adventure kicks off at the Great Wall of China, where Lara is investigating an ancient imperial palace for clues to the dagger's whereabouts. Tigers, vultures, spiders, and more wait to take a piece of you if you're not careful.

From there, it's off to Venice, where you'll raid not a tomb but the hideout of Bartoli, an Italian hood with a private army of goons. It's in these levels that developer Core Design

really proves it can extend this franchise beyond the dank and murky caverns. Venice's outdoor stretches are brilliantly conceived and executed, and they offer quite different challenges than the spelunking sameness of much of TR's cave crawling. You sneak around the

perimeter of the hideout, taking out sentries (in one great moment, you lurk underwater beneath a walkway, then lurch up to waste the baddie) before finding your way into the building. The gunplay, once you're inside, is just dynamite—gunmen on the second floor rain lead from above as you run and roll from pillar to pillar, trading shots with the hoods and keeping one eye peeled for an exit.

The Venice levels are the game's finest moments and bode well for TR's future. Core has me convinced that there's no spot in the world, civilized or ruined, that it can't use as the setting for a thrilling raid.

Venice is also the first of two places in TRII where you can commandeer a vehicle. Here, it's a speedboat for zipping around the canals. The other is in Tibet, where you can snag a snowmobile and slice your way through snowbanks.

The other truly effective environment (again, largely due to its clever originality) is undersea, where you find Lara in a wet suit, swimming to the wreck of a sunken ship. Assuming she can avoid becoming lunch for the sharks and barracudas lurking in the water, she gains access and finds herself up against a posse of mercenaries, including the speargun-armed Scuba, a competing tomb raider.

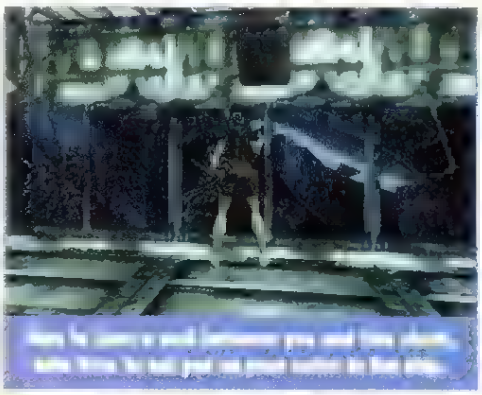
This dimly lit locale best shows off TRII's dynamic lighting—a visual treat you may forget to appreciate, considering how involved you're going to be in the game's action. Gunshot illuminations in dark corridors are nothing short of jaw-dropping, as is the dynamic flickering effect of flares.

The last of the four environments is a sojourn in Tibet, where you'll have to overcome a nasty cult that worships the Dagger of Xian. Oh, and did I mention the Yeti, who likes to pick adventurers up and thump them against walls?

TRII is an ingeniously designed and rewarding game on both the action and puzzle fronts, mixing the two more evenly than did the original. It's still not perfect—tedium can still occasionally creep in when you're temporarily stuck, and there are still some

significant problems with clipping that haven't been resolved, even with the overhaul to the original graphics engine. The sound—particularly the use of music—is still flat and uninspiring in the long run, and the AI of some human opponents doesn't seem any more advanced than the average rat's.

But Tomb Raider II is fun and absorbing entertainment that's going to be tough for any of next year's many aspiring Lara-killers to beat. Intricate, exciting, and with a generous helping of Lara Croft's signature flair, TRII is a treasure.



TOMB RAIDER II

GAMEPLAY: A-
GETTING STARTED: B-
GRAPHICS: A
SOUND CHECK: B

A- OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

Follow that ponytail to adventure, in style.

Core Design
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www.tombraider2.com
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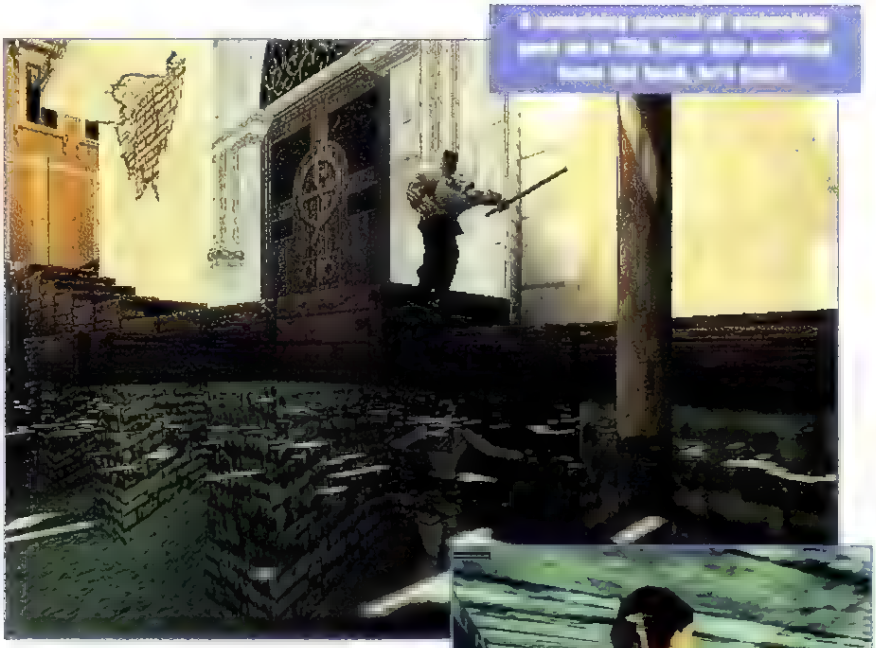
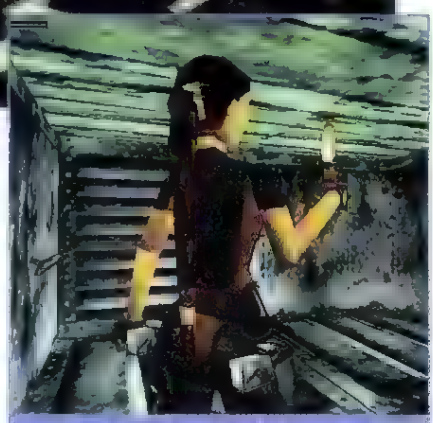




are a necessity and jumping forward just throws you into the canal.

The mayhem

Believe it or not, ambush is often the best way to go about dispatching your enemies. Sniping? In TRII? You betcha. The screens across the bottom of page 64 are a good example.

Another type of ambush is possible, thanks to the dynamic camera. Death from below, baby. Take advantage of situations in which you enter a spot, aware of the enemy's presence when he is unaware of you. The screenshot above finds Lara swimming under a canal and lurking beneath the feet of an unsuspecting sentry. Hold your breath until his back is turned, and then haul yourself over the side of the walkway, draw your gun, and ice the guy.

If you can manage to snag the M-16 outside of Bartoli's hideout (there's a sentry in a sniper nest across the canal from the hideout's main entrance—get up on the ledge, drop into his nest, waste him, and the gun's yours), the time to spring it is when you open the main door and face all the hoodlums.

First, keep moving. Dart from pillar to pillar and pick the hoods off one by one. Be sure you've killed all the guys on the ground floor before concerning yourself with the ones above. After you've wasted all the ground-floor guards, you'll probably need a med kit. Use it, and then assault the second floor using the staircase. Think Al Pacino.

You're going to find numerous spots where a bad guy with a big blunt object (say, a lead pipe) ambushes you in a tight hallway. Don't even think about going toe-to-toe with these people. Hop backward until you have room to pull a gun and blast 'em. In more open areas, you can use a modified form of circle-strafing by side-flipping in circles around a target, pausing with each landing to fire a shot or two. Don't stay still for any longer, though. Fire and flip, fire and flip, and keep your target in front of you.

Watersports

Tomb Raider II adds a significant factor to gameplay its predecessor lacked—the ability to wade in shallow water. Where in TR you were either in the water or not, in TRII you can wade up to waist-deep in water and retain the ability to hold, aim, and shoot a gun—or even wade with a flare in hand to illuminate your way.

The ability to wade and shoot is crucial at several points. One way to snuff a ferocious tiger is to remember that the badass Bengal is just a pussycat when it comes to water—so hop into the hip-deep pond next to his den and watch him go limp at the prospect of following you in. He'll just stand at the edge of the pond and growl. You growl back. With a gun.

Likewise, the ability to wade with a flare in hand is a lifesaver in a half-submerged shaft in the sunken ship. When darkness becomes too thick, light a flare and look out for a climbable grate that offers a way out of the shaft.

Finally, the ability to shoot while underwater allows you to defend yourself against various and sundry aquatic threats. The speargun comes in handy against such people as Scuba, the frogman tomb raider who will challenge you in the sunken ship. ■

TOMB RAIDER II CHEATS!

To skip to the next level:
(1) Light a flare and hold it.
(2) Hold the Shift key and take one step forward, then one step backward.
(3) Release Shift and turn 360 degrees to the right three times (without pausing).
(4) Jump forward. If you did this right, you'll pause in midair, then begin the next level.

To get all weapons, full ammo, and full med kits, follow steps 1 through 3 above, then jump backward instead of forward.

(Tip: Stand next to a wall or face a landmark to gauge whether you're inside a full turn.)

VIOLENT FEMME

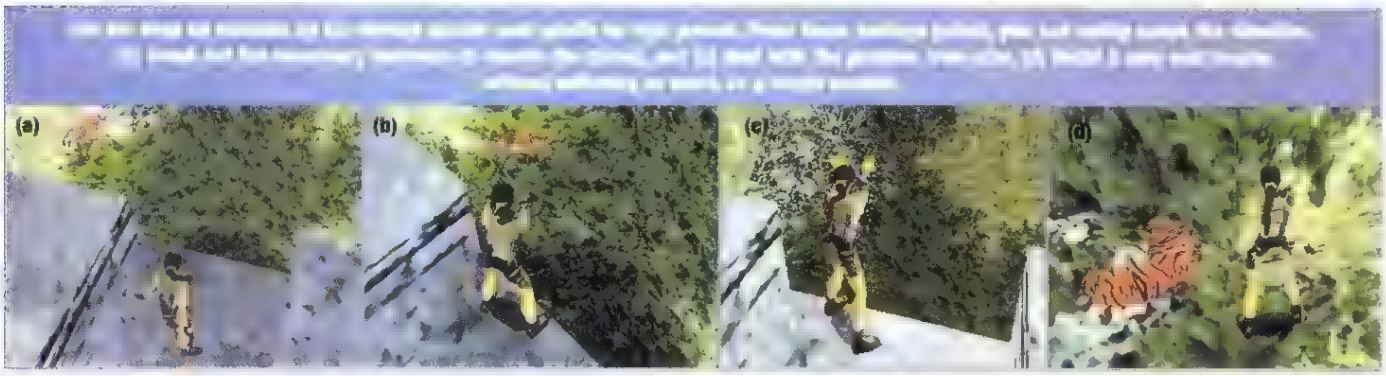
Lara's expanded library of moves makes life a lot easier. Spend time learning how to climb vertical surfaces, and get a good feel for what surfaces are scalable and which aren't. Brick walls and stone walls with grooves can be climbed if you're slow and meticulous. Don't rush it, because one slip-up will send you all the way down.

You can move side-to-side on a vertical surface if there's something to grip. Look for missing chunks from rock faces, and use the holes as handholds. Sometimes you'll have to make a swinging jump and grab something nearby.

Occasionally, the best way to get up and over something is to remember that you can release your grip, fall a short distance, and then use the action key to grab hold again. Some vertical walls don't allow you all the way over a dead end, and the way around them can sometimes be as simple as dropping back, catching a handhold again, and side-to-side swinging to a new climbing position.

Master the fine art of taking a running jump over a crevasse and then catching the lip of the opposite ledge with your fingers. It takes chutzpah, but nothing's more satisfying than hauling yourself up and over the side of a cliff you conquered this way. As a rule of thumb, if the chasm looks like it's no more than two Lara-lengths across, you can probably make it.

Also learn to use back-flipping effectively. It's surprisingly useful when you find yourself in a spot where you need to jump to a small target and then bail out instantly before something nasty happens (like a swinging blade decapitates you). A lot of times, you have a split-second to escape, and the bail-out spot is directly behind you—perfect conditions for a back flip. Learn to jump, touch ground, and back-flip immediately to safety. This is espe cially useful in Venice, where quick jumps



Lara Croft

Deathtrap Dungeon

It's a Fighting Fantasy

So you thought the folks at Eidos would just sit on their laurels and twiddle their thumbs after giving us Ms. Croft? No-siree-bob. They're hard at work preparing yet another femme fatale to wow and entice you. Here's a glimpse at Deathtrap Dungeon, a third-person 3D (of course) action/combat game based on the '80s fighting-fantasy gamebook series created by Ian Livingstone and Steve Jackson.

It all begins in Fang, City of Lost Souls, which used to be known as the City of Plenty. Seems that years ago, Melkor the Red Dragon enslaved the people of Fang and forced them to build a labyrinth. The fearsome lizard made this into his lair and filled it with traps and monsters to guard him. He then proceeded to terrorize and feed on the nearby villagers. Baron Sukumvit, once the ruler of Fang, offered a great reward (10,000 gold pieces) to anyone who could rid the city of the horror. In the first year, seventeen warriors tried, but none returned from Melkor's lair. This venture has become known as The Walk, and you've decided to take on the challenge.

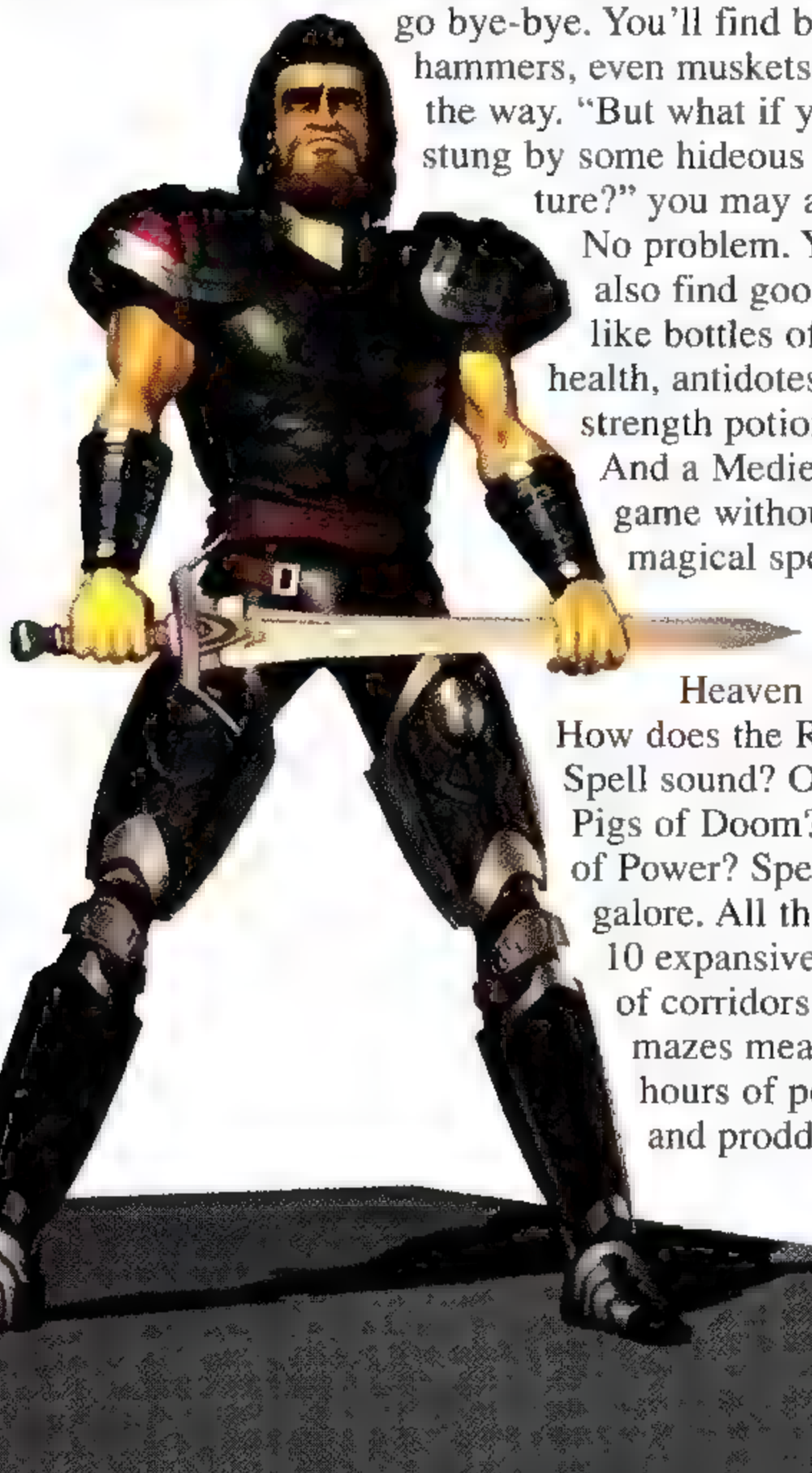
You can take your pick from two characters: Chain Dog and Red Lotus. Chain Dog's a brawny *Arh-nold* type who earned his name in the pits of a dueling arena. Bred to fight as entertainment for nobles and kings, he's so vicious and brutal that the guards had to keep him

chained like a dog. His dreams of attaining freedom and becoming more than a mere killing machine kept him alive and sane. Eventually, his ferocity and skills led him to become the champion of the War pits. An opportune moment with a careless guard led to his escape, and he has been wandering Earth in search of a normal life. Realizing that violence is the only thing he knows, he comes to Fang in search of wealth, so that he might retire to a life of ease.

Red Lotus is a slender but aggressive vixen who could've been Lara Croft's ancestor. She was kidnapped by pirates and made a slave at an extremely young age. Raised among murderous thieves and pirates, she learned and mastered every dirty trick in the combat book. Her skills in killing soon made her feared among the pirates, but rage and hatred was all she knew. She vowed never to give herself to any man, save for the one who could defeat her in battle. Many have tried, but none have succeeded. She comes to Fang in search of wealth and fame, and perhaps the one person who can finally claim her as his own.

Oh yeah, there's a reason why they call this Death*trap* Dungeon. From moving spikes, flame-throwing juggernauts, and steam-shooting hallways to giant bowling balls à la Indiana Jones, the traps are everywhere! (In the late beta version we played, we found a room full, just *full* of goodies to pick up. In our giddiness, we failed to see the stinkin' flamers hidden in the walls. Talk about a sunburn...) And if that's not enough, even when you're doing something simple like walking across a bridge, make one false move and you'll wind up a decorative splatter at the bottom of the dungeon (hence the *death* part).

Pick up a sword (or use your bare hands if you feel extremely adventurous and stooo-pid) and begin the dungeon delving. You'll have tons of fun slashing away at deadly zombies, evil orcs, fire-breathing dragons, homicidal mummies — up to 55 different baddies. Wha..? You say you don't feel especially comfortable being five inches away from a giant scorpion? That's OK: just hurl a bomb at it and watch it go bye-bye. You'll find bombs, hammers, even muskets along the way. "But what if you get stung by some hideous creature?" you may ask. No problem. You'll also find goodies like bottles of health, antidotes, and strength potions. And a Medieval game without magical spells?



Heaven forbid. How does the Razor Spell sound? Or War Pigs of Doom? Arc of Power? Spells galore. All this and 10 expansive levels of corridors and mazes means hours of poking and prodding.

If you're familiar with Lara's adventures, you'll feel right at home with the intuitive third-person camera angle. Sumptous 3Dfx-rendered images are sure to impress, but perhaps the neatest touch is the first-person viewer, which enables you to look up, down, sideways, and so on when you hold down the Tab key. We can't tell you how many times this saved us from jumping onto the "lower plank," only to find steel spikes waiting. And here's something to make you Tomb Raider fans envious: Multiplay! Yes, you'll be able to hack away at your friends. And all this should run on a P133 with 16MB of RAM and a 4x CD-ROM drive. Yes, Deathtrap Dungeon has the battle-scarred hallmarks of a keeper — and Red Lotus will give Lara some fierce competition for gamers' desktops.

DEATHTRAP DUNGEON

PUBLISHER:	Eidos Interactive
WEB:	www.eidosinteractive.com
AVAILABLE:	January 1998

Lara's Back in Town, and She's Brought a New Friend!

While kicking butt and taking names in the Himalayas in Tomb Raider, Lara Croft captured the hearts and desktops of gamers everywhere. Now she's back and sassier than ever...with lots of surprises in store for you in her latest adventure.

Better yet, she's got a friend—and perhaps some competition—she'd like to introduce to you: Red Lotus from Eidos' upcoming Deathtrap Dungeon. Red's lithe like Lara, and she's got one heck of a mean streak…

Name: *Lara Croft*

Bust: *34D* **Waist:** *24* **Hips:** *34*

Height: *5' 9"*

Weight: *110 lbs.*

Date of Birth: *14 February* **Place of Birth:** *Wimbledon, England*

Ambitions: *To find the coveted Dagger of Xian*

Turn-ons: *Big guns, ancient relics, and being Windows wallpaper*

Turn-offs: *Bad hygiene, Nude Raider, geeks unable to control their joysticks*

What makes a woman sexy: *Strong will, sharp wit, vast intelligence... a big pair of guns doesn't hurt either*

A typical day in your life: *Get up, go adventuring, evade traps, evade tricks, jump, climb, swim— y'know, your typical everyday stuff*

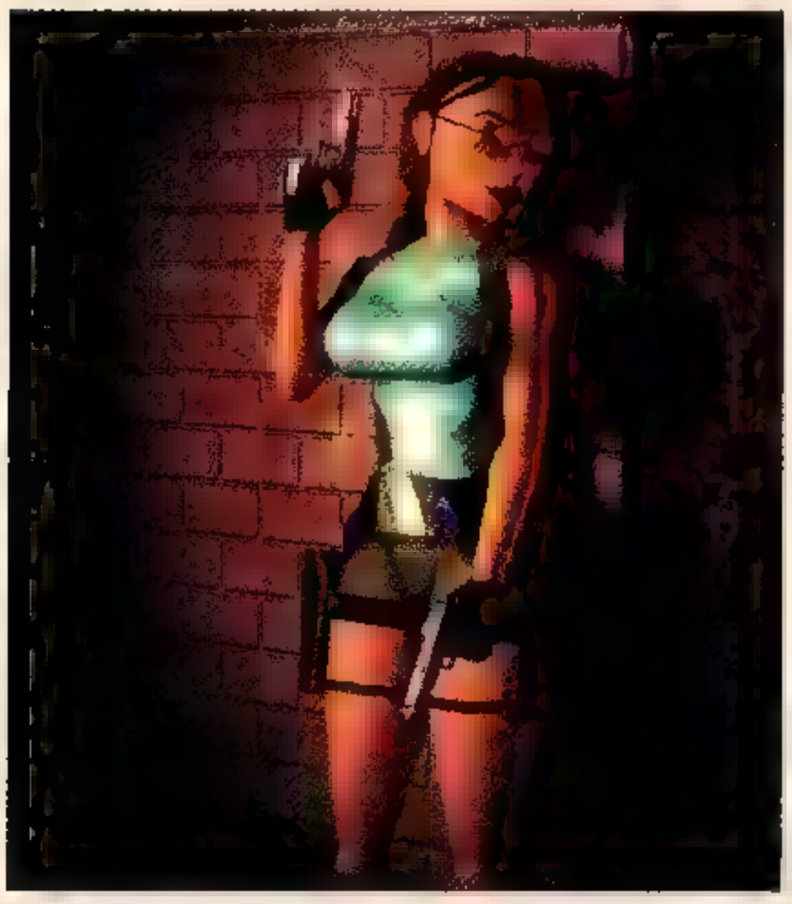
What you find sexy in men: *Submission, sense of humor, an adventurous spirit, liking to play games*

Your future: *You'll have to wait and see...*

Ideal date: *Any PC Games reader*

Lara Croft, first daugther of Lord Henshingley Croft, was raised to be an aristocrat from birth. Unable to stand the suffocating atmosphere of upper-class British society, she realized that she was only truly alive when she was traveling—alone. Famed for discovering several ancient sites of profound archaeological interest, she made a name for herself by publishing travel books and detailed journals of her exploits.

In Lara's latest adventure, she seeks out the lost Dagger of Xian, a coveted relic thought to bring supernatural powers. Once again, she traverses the world on a journey of mystery...



For games we've rated as an A or A-, admittance to the Best of the A-List is the ultimate honor; if it's on this list, it's not just great, it *rocks*. Serious gamers will want all of these titles in their collections.

Civilization II	(June '96)	MicroProse
Close Combat: A Bridge Too Far	(Jan '98)	Microsoft
C&C: Red Alert	(Feb '97)	Westwood Studios
Diablo	(Feb '97)	Blizzard Entertainment
Duke Nukem 3D	(July '96)	GT Interactive
Dungeon Keeper	(Sept '97)	Electronic Arts
Jedi Knight	(Dec '97)	LucasArts
Links LS '98	(Oct '97)	Access Software
Lords of the Realm II	(March '97)	Sierra On-Line
Master of Orion II	(March '97)	MicroProse
MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries	(Dec '96)	Activision
MDK	(May/June '97)	Playmates
NHL 98	(Nov '97)	Electronic Arts
Pro Pinball: Timeshock!	(Sept '97)	Empire Interactive
Starfleet Academy	(Nov '97)	Interplay
Quake	(Oct '96)	GT Interactive
Total Annihilation	(Dec '97)	GT Interactive
Twinsen's Odyssey	(Sept '97)	Activision
X-COM: Apocalypse	(Oct '97)	MicroProse
X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter	(July/Aug '97)	LucasArts

WHAT WE'RE PLAYING

Yes, the *PC Games* editors play tons of games, but there are some we've stuck with beyond the call of duty. Here are the five games we've been playing the most over the past month.

1. Jedi Knight
2. Myth
3. FIFA 98
4. Total Annihilation
5. Flying Corps Gold

HOW WE RATE

Here at *PC Games* we use a letter-grade system to rate games. Everyone knows what our grades mean without needing an in-depth explanation or clever chart: an A+ is the best score possible and an F is a complete bust. To give you a better feel for the overall quality of a title, we rate each game in six key areas. We also select a Game of the Month for each issue. We review games when and only when the makers say they're ready for review.

GAME of the MONTH: The *PC Games* Game of the Month is the one title among the month's releases that stands out from the rest. While it's generally the best overall game of the month, a game will occasionally warrant this honor not because it's the highest-rated game in the issue, but because it's a standout in one or more areas.

GAMEPLAY: In a nutshell, how much fun is it to play? This takes into account the quality of the game's interface and control scheme.

GETTING STARTED: How much reading, studying, and hardware-tweaking are required before you can start to have fun? (The less the better.)

GRAPHICS: How advanced and attractive are the game's visual elements, and how well do they serve the game? If a game's 3D-accelerated graphics are significantly different than its standard look, we offer separate grades.

SOUND CHECK: How good are the game's sounds and musical score, and how well do they serve the game?

OVERALL GRADE: All in all, how strongly do we recommend the game for purchase?

MULTIPLAYER: How much value will you get from the game's multiplayer element, if there is one? (N/A = not available) This independent rating takes into account ease of multiplayer setup.

Some Say Role Playing Is Dead...

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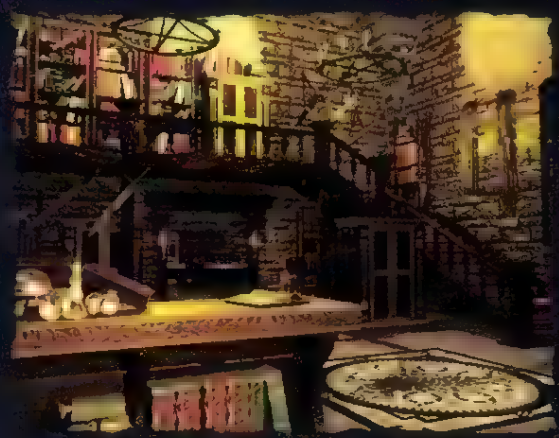

Experience breathtaking 16-bit, 65,000-color graphics in a smooth-scrolling, high-res environment.

Might and Magic VI

The Mandate of Heaven

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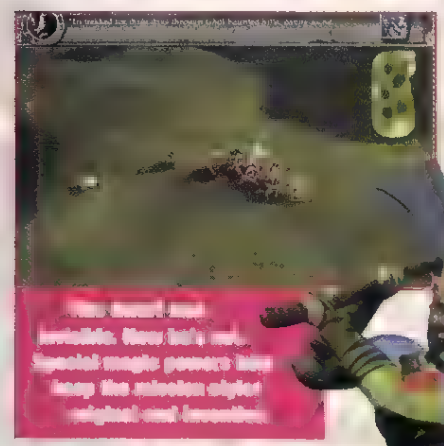
RP

Myth: The Fallen Lords

By Rob "Berserker" Smith

The stuff legends are made of

You may have heard of Myth. *PC Games* heralded it as the most anticipated game of the holiday season—a statement that was the culmination of watching the development cycle unfold since an early look way back in our March 1997 issue. Myth's standout feature wasn't the jaw-dropping 3Dfx-powered graphics that turned the game world into a detailed "real" environment; it was the 3D, tactical-battle slant on the real-time strategy genre.



Yep, Myth is a real-time strategy game of sorts, but it certainly isn't a wannabe C&C—it has a style, panache, flavor, and future all its own. And for that fact alone, it deserves kudos. The fact that it also incorporates some bizarrely hypnotic single-player gameplay and robustly structured multiplayer options just proves we knew what we were talking about.

Developed by Bungie, Myth has all the hallmarks of that small, quality company, which made its name with the Marathon series (the thinking-man's first-person shooter). The game has plot, pacing, high production values, and a sense of humor. Where recent real-time strategy games tended to lose their stories amid a tidal wave of funky unit designs and options galore, Myth takes a more traditional approach to the fantasy genre, but it manages to avoid all the clichés.

An epic war is in progress, fought by the Light side against the Dark forces and Balor, leader of the Fallen Lords. But this isn't a war of anonymous recruits, faceless infantry, and expendable units. It's close, it's personal, it's bloody, and it's real. The background story is presented via a compelling narration that highlights the personal nature of your involvement in the Light's struggle against the elements, overwhelming odds (naturally), and incompetent generalship (but that's your fault).

A narrator sets the scene, using his journal entries to chart the progress of this seven-year-long struggle. A tactical map shows the location of the battle and where the enemy is likely to come from, and the narration explains your objective. The dangers hinted at in the mission-briefings are occasionally animated with a little cinematic. They're fine, but their cartoon style seemed to diminish the harsh reality instilled by the narrator's gravelly voice.

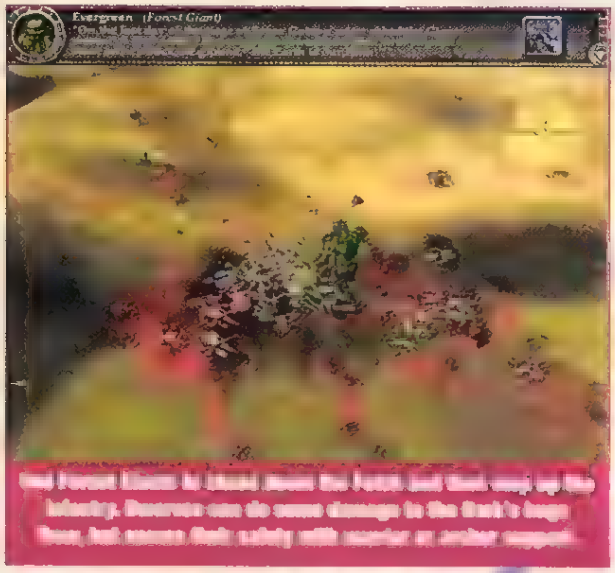
Your troops are a diverse lot, ranging from more typical characters to ones that avoid the traditional, clichéd fantasy-genre styles. Dwarves are grenade throwers, weak in hand-to-hand combat; archers, er, shoot arrows; and warriors are your frontline troops. Then there are the Journeymen, who essentially act as medics; Berserks, who owe more than a casual nod to Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* troops; and Forest Giants, who do some serious damage. Various mixes of these classes are supplied for battle in each of the 25 missions. There are no resources to collect or manage—it's all about the fighting.

And it ain't easy. Myth uses a fully 3D engine with a close perspective (scalable, so you can zoom really close into the heart of the bloody slaughter), which takes a little getting used to. The in-game tutorial is pretty sparse and doesn't really ready the budding general for the tactics needed for success.

The "normal," middle-difficulty level of the five available is a real challenge. I managed to fail the first mission three times, but after completing a few, I started again and flew through without casualties. That level of success can't be repeated regularly—such is the variation resulting from play style and movement choice.

So what changed? I began learning tactics. What helped was the way the progressive missions introduced subtle new challenges and understated attack methods.

Subtlety—that's the overriding sense from the single-player game. There's no rousing background score: characters react with



simple grunts, and ambient sounds of wind, rain, and the meeting of sword and flesh are the only other sounds.

Level design is fairly simple. Houses, creeks, bridges, and hillocks add plenty of variety and need to be used strategically in battle. As the plot progresses, the originality of ice-covered levels, burned-out buildings, fleeing villagers, and deep pools of water that hide the devastating Wights (they're like kamikazes— waddling towards your troops, then detonating themselves) give way to deep pools of blood and flat, desolate scenes.

But the quality of the story and the personal involvement the narration manages to convey keep you going. These are enhanced by the ability to bring veteran units from one mission to the next. Characters (who are individually named, and whom you can rename) become true comrades-in-arms. The longer they survive, the better they get.

Tactical use of the terrain is also key. Being on higher ground can be vital, as is moving your units in specific ways, using any of the 10 formations provided. The simple select-click control method works well, aided by the ability to make units face a particular direction with a quick flick of the mouse after they've been moved.

Unfortunately, there are a few AI ambiguities. Units have great difficulty moving past each other in tight areas (such as over a bridge) when there appears to be plenty of space to move. It's also annoying (though not a bug) that archers or dwarves may unload their ammo into your own troops, should they be left to their own devices or badly lined up. There's nothing more frustrating than losing valuable units to friendly fire.

But all this single-player planning is just a prelude to the real longevity of Myth. Bungie.net is already buzzing with eager combatants playing any of the seven different game types. Up to 16 players can compete in deathmatch battles, but King of the Hill and Steal the Bacon (win the ball and then hold it until the user-definable time limit is up) make team play great fun. The six rooms have consistently had hundreds of players available at all hours. A ranking structure with a limited number of top positions gives everyone something to aim for.

Multiplayer has been very thoughtfully designed. Trading troops is an option, so your starting armies can be different to suit different game types or play styles. The time limit adds another element, and the varied scoring methods (number of kills, kills vs. deaths, time in possession of the hill/bacon, etc.) mean that even a player eliminated early in a game can have gained some rank improvement.

Myth is a cunningly simple concept that's well designed, practically implemented, and difficult to master. It certainly benefits from a

3Dfx-powered card, but even nonaccelerated, the explosions, the chunks of seared flesh looping through the air, the lightning zap of the Dark side Fetch—all give a great sense of the slaughter. People die. Dwarves die. Forest Giants die. And in Myth, you genuinely feel sad for them. Keeping them alive is a task to be tried and mastered. You'll be trying for many, many months to come.

MYTH: THE FALLEN LORDS

GAMEPLAY: A-
GETTING STARTED: B
GRAPHICS: B+
SOUND CHECK: B+

A- OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: A

A bloody riot.

PUBLISHER	Bungie 800 295 0060
WEB	www.bungie.net
PLATFORM	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES	P133, 16MB RAM, 30MB HD, 4x CD ROM drive
RECOMMENDED	P200, 32MB RAM, 336MB HD, 3Dfx card, 8x CD-ROM drive, 28.8 modem
STREET PRICE	$40

CHEATS
▼ To play any level, hold down the Space Bar then select New Game
▼ To win any level, hit **Ctrl** and **+**

TIPS
▼ Never have dwarves in two line-format ons They'll blow each other up ▼ Jse a l your forces together, rather than as ndiv dual groups. For example, have dwarves grenade an oncoming group of Thrall, set archers up to pepper them with arrows as the dwarves retreat, and as the archers move out of the way, mop up with the warriors ▼ Remember the retreat command it can save valuable troops. If a Wight sneaks up, hit the scatter command as quickly as possible ▼ Use archers to take out Wights from a distance

PLAY THE DEM ON PC GAMES EXE CD-ROM

SWIV 3D Assault

By Peter Olafson

An old friend gets a new lick of paint

Silkworm is the computer-game equivalent of the shark: It keeps moving in order to stay alive. It started out in the late '80s as a particularly frenetic horizontal shooter. In the early '90s, it became a particularly frenetic vertical shoot-'em-up called SWIV (Silkworm IV, somehow skipping over II and III). And in late 1997, after a turn on console, it's migrated to third-person 3D as SWIV 3D Assault.

It's certainly alive, though I confess I sometimes had the impulse to check its pulse.

This newest incarnation is what one might expect to see if Return Fire and Extreme Assault had a child. SWIV 3D finds you piloting six craft—a stolen helicopter, buggy, skidoo, hovership, landspeeder, and skimmer—through 25 missions in 5 burnished game worlds.

They're pretty, and the game gets a lot of mileage out of those good looks. In the 3Dfx version I played, waters rolled beguilingly, and sculpted, stony hillsides displayed not even a hint of a seam or a hard angle. Effects like the smart bomb, the detailing on the trees, and the variety of ruins destroyed buildings leave behind—which sometimes conceal power-ups—show much of the same polish.

A pleasantly wide range of power-ups are hauled up by hook in the fashion of EA's Strike line (the advantage being that you don't have to stop over the target). The difficulty starts at a respectable level and is ratcheted up immediately thereafter. The controls are nicely laid out. The fog effect is just far enough ahead of your craft that the game doesn't feel chopped-down. And the classical music (optional) gives SWIV 3D the appropriate napalm-in-the-morning glow.

The problem is that size ultimately does matter. While you can switch between the chopper and the buggy vehicles once you find 'em, they are far too small to feel persuasive—to make that dent in one's consciousness that says "I count for something." (I'm reminded of the pathetic model of Stonehenge in *This is Spinal Tap*.) Craft maneuvering feels less like controlling a vehicle than a hummingbird or dragonfly, and that makes them seem trivial (especially when considered alongside the substantial craft in Nuclear Strike). The buggy in particular looks—and comes apart—like a cheap child's toy.

Other niggling disappointments abound. Tracked vehicles shouldn't be able to move laterally (as enemies sometimes do here). You can't call up a map during a mission, so you have to rely on an inset displaying your immediate surroundings. Your basic weapon doesn't make a sound. And the missions are rather nondescript. Essentially, they go like this: (1) Blow this up (2) then blow this up (3) and, finally, blow this up. In other words, beyond a page in the manual and the usual rendered intro, there's no in-game reference to the meaning of all the renegade pyrotechnics here.

But SWIV 3D isn't bad; it just hasn't been thoroughly thought through. My advice to its creators: Not too shabby. Have a cold one on me.

But keep moving.

SWIV 3D ASSAULT

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

Small, simple. Small and simple. That covers it.

DEVELOPER	SCi
PUBLISHER	Interplay 800-468 3775
WEB	www.interplay.com
PLATFORM	DOS/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES	P90, 16MB RAM, 68MB HD, VGA, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED	P120, 130MB HD, 3Dfx-based card, 4x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE	$30

TIPS ▼ Estuary Assault is the first tough mission. The buggy you start with is simply overmatched, and while missiles are plentiful, health/repair boosts are not. ▼ Collect the three missile caches around your starting location, switch over to homing missiles, make for the nearby beach, hang a hard right, and head off at top speed. ▼ Don't get into gun battles, but use the homies to blast the missile launchers while on the move. ▼ Eventually, you'll come upon your chopper—which will give you access to the level's interior and its plentiful store of power-ups.

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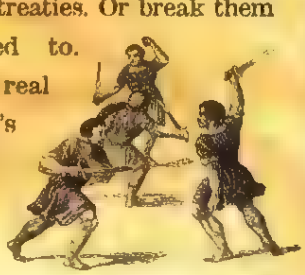

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The Curse of Monkey Island

By Barry Brenesal

Extraordinarily funny

Vegetarian cannibals. El Pollo Diablo. A buccaneer hairstyling salon. An exclusive country club for retired pirates and their families, featuring valet ship parking. Yes, all this and more can be yours in The Curse of Monkey Island. It's the third adventure set in a piratical but highly improbable Caribbean, featuring the incompetent Guybrush Threepwood, his life's love Elaine Marley, and the undead zombie pirate LeChuck. It's arguably the best of the three, and that's high praise.

The curse in the title refers to an enormous engagement ring Guybrush lifts from LeChuck's treasure trove and presents to Elaine. It turns her into a gold statue, forcing our hero to undergo innumerable perils and puzzle-based tests of intelligence as he seeks to reverse the spell.

The first few puzzles in The Curse of Monkey Island are simple; but once you're beyond the initial scenes, the game's developers open the throttle to their wicked imaginations. All of the many objects you find are put to logical and often surprising use. Sure, it's frustrating, but think of it this way: what other game teaches you how to make a guaranteed hangover cure, or to defeat mimes in unarmed combat?

The success of LucasArts' humorous graphic adventures doesn't depend upon puzzles, however, good as those are. They flourish on sheer atmosphere. You're not expected to make the right dialogue choices. You're expected to access *all* the dialogue choices—because it's the creativity that's been invested in off-kilter conversations and storyline situations that gives games like this their particular flavor.

Above all, it's the game's humor that's consistently on display, ranging from the sharply sardonic to the disfiguringly punful. There's none of the recourse to cheap jokes pervading Journeyman Project 3 or Discworld II—no quotes from *Star Trek* or tired gags about flower children. Anachronisms abound in Monkey Island III, but they're wonderfully off-the-wall. This is, after all, the only game that lets you ask a mystical know-it-all voodoo priestess about the wisdom of variable-rate mortgages.

Graphics are a rather crucial element in a, er, graphic adventure, and to LucasArts' eternal credit, it didn't try to imitate Disney Studios, *Scooby Doo*, or Japanese anime in its search for this suitably attractive and well animated visual style. Monkey Island III looks perceptibly like I and II, only with higher resolution and more personality. Elaine Marley is sexier than before, and LeChuck more fearsome. Guybrush himself has grown into tall, earnest, gawkish manhood—a cross between Ichabod Crane and Prince Charles. The background musical score is great, with Michael Long's central theme once again the kind that any motion picture would die for.

The Curse of Monkey Island can be played with captions, voiceovers, or both. There's also a standard puzzle-setting, and one that eliminates several of the more fiendish high-end puzzles.

The Secret of Monkey Island was an enormous success. By contrast, LeChuck's Revenge seemed weak, and the laughs intermittent. Curse, though, features all the vitality of the original release. If you want inventive puzzles, fine graphics, and, above all, enough wit to power an entire season of prime-time television, don't miss this game.

THE CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	A
OVERALL	A
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

Hilarious and inventive—an adventure with style.

PUBLISHER	LucasArts 800 985 8227
WEB	www.lucasarts.com
PLATFORM	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES	P90, 16MB RAM, 22MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED	P133
STREET PRICE	$50

TIPS ▼ Don't just try to take an item and give up if you can't. Some items reveal their contents only if you examine them. ▼ Some items can be used more than once—forget the tradition of one-shot uses. ▼ Grab everything you can. ▼ Ask questions repeatedly. Sometimes you'll just get more funny replies, but at other times, Guybrush's whining will pay dividends.

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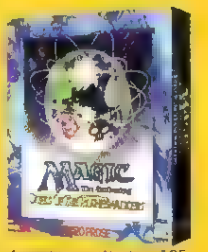

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MAGIC THE GATHERING

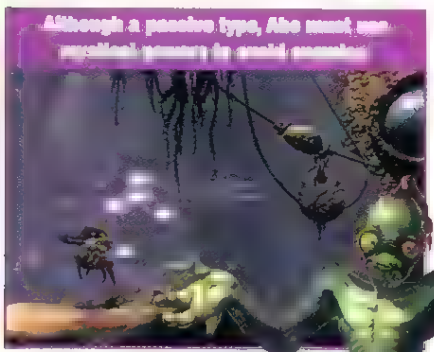
Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee

By Chris Hudak

Soylent running

"Get me out of here!" That's the plaintive, nasal cry of Abe, the skinny, bewildered, unarmed hero of Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee—and after just a cursory look at his place of employment/enslavement, you can see why. The bleak, mechanical environs of the Rupture Farms meatpacking plant look like an H.R. Giger bad dream—metallic catwalks, military-industrial blacks and grays, morale-killing LED readouts ("Only 1,236 work-related accidents this month. Keep up the good work!"), and gore-splattered piping, meat-saws, supports, and conveyors.

Abe wants out because he's just made a grisly discovery: The plant's proposed new line of snack treats has a startling ingredient—the meat of the Mudokon species. The bad news is that Abe and all his fellow coworkers just happen to *be* Mudokons. With your help, he can drop the Odd wrench (as it were) into the slaughterhouse works of Rupture Farms and maybe—just maybe—come back in triumph to save his people. Unarmed, outnumbered, and hunted by insectile stormtroopers called Sligs,

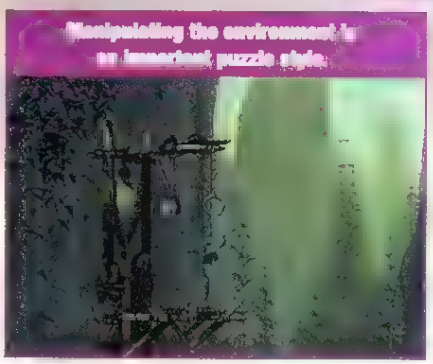


Although a passive type, Abe must use mystical powers to avoid enemies.

Abe's only hope is to be cautious but cunning; stealthy but crafty; soylent but deadly, you might say.

The only word applicable to Abe's Oddysee, as both a game and a brilliant fusion of storyline and action, is masterpiece. From the intro movie (equal parts uneasy mood and subdued humor, with a nice icy trickle of panicky, clinical horror) to the seamless transition to active gameplay, the game drops novice and expert gamers alike right into the action. No life bars, ammo meters, scores, or other onscreen impedimentia get in the way of the rich graphics.

Every part of this game is suffused with a thorough grounding in character, plot, pacing, and transition. Case specific: At one point, a gun-toting Slig suddenly



Manipulating the environment is an important puzzle style.

charges onscreen the instant—I'm talking the nanosecond—the player heaves Abe up onto his first overhead ledge, just out of danger's reach. The effect is startling, leaving a powerful impression of just how close the escape was...and how paranoid to be from that moment on. Beautiful.

The gameplay is pure, old-school side-scroller, level-roamer fare—running, jumping, climbing, throwing, and mastering the Simon-like "Gamespeak" communication skills, which require Abe to mimic the tones (and bodily noises!) of various guards and monitors. It's loaded with story-relevant puzzles and jacked up with high-gloss character animation and background art.

After a brief, harrowing tour of the Rupture Farms, Abe must escape into the outside world (every bit as natural and vibrant as the plant is toxic and dismal). Without giving too much away, Abe's training in the ancient proving grounds outside the plant is where he'll fight a host of scary, ill-tempered creatures and gain new, mystical powers. Indeed, he starts the game with the ability to chant and "possess" nearby Sligs,

The Mysterious Portal makes exciting enemies a challenge.

thence moving the target Slig around as though its body were Abe's own—setting off otherwise Mudokon-killing traps and, just for kicks, machine-gunning other unsuspecting Sligs.

In addition to the intuitive gameplay, Abe is just a really cool character, with lots of...well, character. He giggles when he's happy, hisses when he's pissed off, and turns toward you with a shoulder-shrugging "I dunno" when it's not clear what you want him to do. Abe's Oddysee is the purest, richest, best-looking, most thorough level-roamer to date. If the proposed sequels in this quintology are even close to this quality, I'll be first in line for all of them.

ODDWORLD: ABE'S ODDYSEE

GAMEPLAY:	A
GETTING STARTED:	A+
GRAPHICS :	A
SOUND CHECK:	A-

A OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

Meaty.

DEVELOPER:	Oddworld Inhabitants
PUBLISHER:	GT Interactive 800-610-4847
WEB:	www.gtinteractive.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P120, 16MB RAM, 1MB HD, SVGA, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 32MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$50

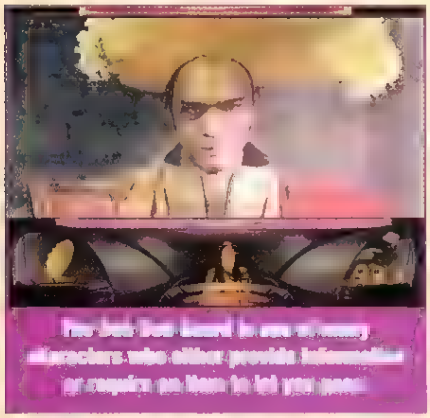
TIPS ▼ Look carefully at your environment—useful items as well as dangers can be very small and subtle. If something could potentially harm you, assume it will if given the chance. ▼ Small showers of crumbling debris are a sign that climbable ledges are nearby—or that survivable drops await below

Journeyman Project 3: Legacy of Time

By Barry Brenesal

...nues

In this third installment of the continuing Journeyman Project series, you once again play Gage Blackwood. Twice before, you've donned a timesuit in the service of humanity and the Temporal Security Agency, righting universal wrongs and solving puzzles everywhere. Now, Earth is under threat from nasty aliens, who have thrice leveled cities long-believed mythical: Shangri-La, Atlantis, and El Dorado. You must rescue a valuable technology hidden at each of the sites, or Earth will be destroyed.



The graphics will draw your attention as soon as you sleep past the lengthy opening video. (And fair warning: there's a *lot* of non-interactive video in this game.) The interface bar is standard SVGA, but the main view above it uses lower resolution. This means all the visuals appear slightly out of focus, however painstakingly animated, beautifully detailed, and well colored they are.

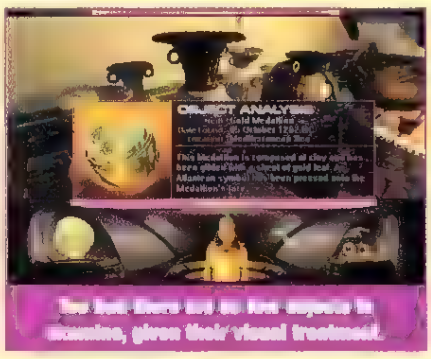
It was a deliberate choice on the developers' part, sacrificing some visual clarity so that players can turn about on a 360-degree spherical axis with reasonable speed, stopping literally at any point. However, there are usually only one or two paths to take from any given location, and very few items you can examine. The any-angle idea, though good in theory, has little application in JP3, because there just isn't much to interact with.

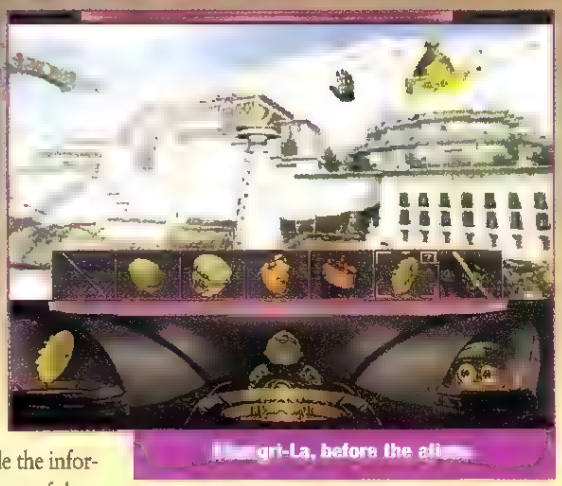
The phrase "good idea, poor implementation" sums up yet another JP3 feature: a futuristic timesuit technology that allows Gage to assume images of people he encounters in his travels. It's much easier to speak with a guard if you can look like his commander, after all.

However intriguing this sounds, it works out to be pure gimmick. There are no multiple plot pathways through each time segment based upon the disguises you assume; instead, the character you're talking to will or won't provide the information you require, based on the image of the moment. Disguises thus become yet another find-object/use-object part of the puzzle, rather than an integral and interesting story element. Logical inconsistencies in the plot don't help either.

It also follows that when you assume a disguise, you should speak with that character's voice. JP3 doesn't do that. Instead, Arthur, the informational AI you carry around, asks questions in his own voice. You're presumably supposed to believe he's disguising it. I didn't. Neither will you.

Arthur himself isn't much of a success. He was introduced in JP2 for a combination of wisecracking and background data on the historical sites Gage visited. (His lines are written by comedian Matt Weinhold.) Since JP3 uses only fictional locations—albeit ones based closely on appropriate real-world paradigms—Arthur jokes much and informs little in this game. His humor relies all too often on wheezy, cheap-shot anachronisms.





...gri-La, before the ali...

Arthur also provides extensive puzzle hints, but the need for them is dubious. JP3's puzzles start with the embarrassingly simple and progress to below-average difficulty by the end of the game. Nor are there very many puzzles, even over four CDs. The game is just over far too soon—possibly as quickly as 10 hours.

Considering both its limitations and its great graphics, JP3 is more suited to a youngster new to the genre than to an experienced adventure fan.

JOURNEYMAN PROJECT 3

GAMEPLAY:	C
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	C+
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

Some great ideas are wasted in this utterly conventional graphic adventure.

DEVELOPER	Presto Studios
PUBLISHER	Red Orb Entertainment 800-521-6263
WEB	www.redorb.com
PLATFORM	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES	P90, 16MB RAM, 20MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED	P133
STREET PRICE	$50

TIPS ▼ When a light bulb appears above Arthur's head, it's because you're standing very close to an important puzzle clue or solution. Click on the bulb for the answer. ▼ Can't get past the miller downstairs in the windmill? Fix the gears of his machine, then go for a little fresh air. ▼ You have an unlimited supply of gold coins in El Dorado, so don't spare the cab fare.

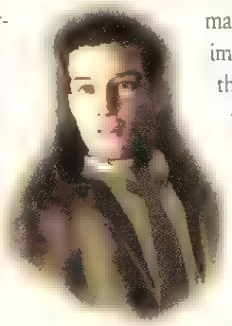
Blade Runner

By Peter Olafson

Short but darkly sweet

The Replicants of *Blade Runner* are quintessentially tragic characters. These androids have a false past, a limited future, and are cursed with awareness of their own mortality. Small surprise that a group of advanced Nexus 6 models has found its way home to Earth—sparing no brutality en route—to confront their creators and ask for more time.

It's also a lament I can imagine issuing from the lips of gamers playing Westwood's first adventure since the third Kyrandia game. Despite five acts and seven potential endings spread over four CDs, the eagerly anticipated Blade Runner seems a little on the short side.



But it's also faithful in execution, beautiful to look at, and charmingly variable in content. Indeed, it's the only graphic adventure I've seen that actually matures with replay, acquiring some of the grim poetry of the movie on which it's founded.

It's not simply a game based on Ridley Scott's classic 1982 film, though. Blade Runner the game runs parallel to events in the film. Indeed, picking out film references is part of the fun. Here, you're newly assigned Replicant-hunter Ray McCoy, and you're quite literally asleep at the wheel when called to investigate the destruction of a pet shop's entire stock. What follows starts out as a straight detective story: McCoy spends the early stages of the game collecting a reservoir of evidence, chatting with witnesses, and occasionally bringing out his piece to wax a "skin job."

Happily, the story isn't a fixed property. A character who's a Replicant in one game may not be in another. But how you play the game changes it in ways surprising and challenging. Icing the wrong person really sharpens the blade.

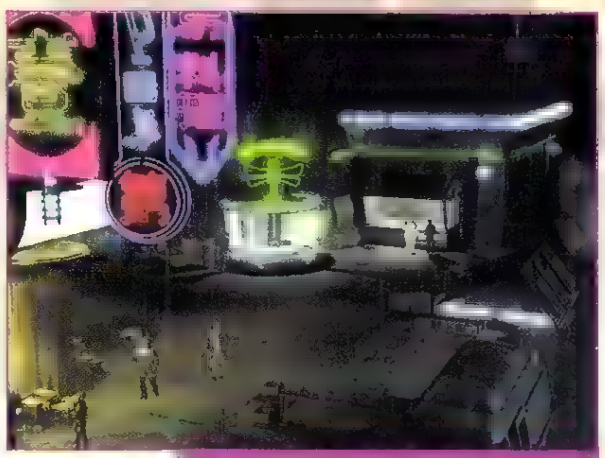
Westwood has done a decent job of re-creating Scott's vision of 2019 Los Angeles: the perpetual rain, the heavy Asian influence, the ambient lighting, neon everywhere, the ruined under-city, the towering new one with buildings that look like guitar amplifiers. While I'm tired of cut-scene mannequins, the creations here have a delightfully loose-limbed quality. (Caveats: They're just slightly over-the-top in their gestures, which are often inappropriate, and their eyes still look painted-on.)

An especially nice translation is the Esper—a computer that allows you to manipulate captured images to draw out the tiniest and sometimes most critical details. It's great fun to use and the next best thing to being there.

One small complaint about gamestuff, though: while Westwood's made a solid effort to organize the large and varied inventory, BR lacks a simple "find" function that would call up any item. (Some items seemed to just vanish.)

On a broader scale, I wish Westwood had created an open world rather than a semilinear game. You don't control your Spinner—cut-scenes handle most location-to-location travel. New locations appear on the Spinner's city map as they're suggested by evidence. By the same token, the game seems to do a lot of thinking for McCoy, and I never felt the voice I adopted (polite, surly, normal, or erratic) really mattered.

I also sensed some ham-handed design (or editing) later in the game. All of a sudden, an unexpected bad guy was revealed; McCoy happened on a folder full of evidence that incriminated him—always a mark of hasty work; and the game fairly raced to its conclusion. Gee, what's the rush, folks? Take your time. Let us explore this wet, dark world.



McCoy checks out Animoid Row, where he'll find some major clues.

You can, by replaying the game—and that's a peculiarly satisfying experience, if a rather too brief one. I did enjoy Blade Runner; indeed, I'm still enjoying it. But, like those tragic Replicants, I just wanted a little more time.

BLADE RUNNER

GAMEPLAY: B
GETTING STARTED: B+
GRAPHICS: A-
SOUND CHECK: B+

B OVERALL

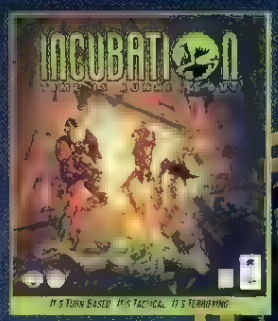
MULTIPLAYER: N/A

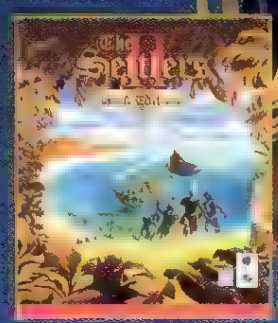
Get your kicks—retire Nexus 6.

PUBLISHER:	Westwood Studios 800-874-4607
WEB:	www.westwood.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 175MB HD, 2MB SVGA, 4x CD ROM drive
RECOMMENDED	P133, 32MB RAM, 300MB (or 1.9GB) HD
STREET PRICE	$50

TIPS ▼ Even if you can't catch up to the fleeing Rep cook in Chinatown, you may find a key bit of evidence in the trash bin you'll pass along the way ▼ Icing a human or two is a quick way to change your path through Blade Runner. Just don't do it with anyone looking, or it won't be "game different," but "game over." ▼ Getting into Early Q's VIP lounge is a bit tricky, as the bouncer, Hanoi, will intercept every attempt unless you can lure him to the stage first

Wanna Get Your Hands On These?





ALBION

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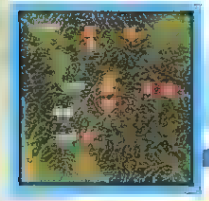


Longbow 2

By Andy Mahood

Whirlybird wonderland

PC GAMES A-List

Playing Longbow 2 for a few days on a non-3Dfx P133 was enough to convince me that Andy Hollis and his crew at Origin Skunk Works had hit another home run with this much-anticipated sequel to AH-64D Longbow.

Even without 3Dfx-enhanced graphics, this sequel is rich in detail and eminently playable on a minimum platform PC. When I introduced a Diamond Monster 3D card into my system, I proceeded to become absolutely gob-smacked! The photorealistic flight visuals and lighting effects are nothing short of spectacular. Coupled with the game's advanced flight model, superb AI, and dynamic campaign engine, Longbow 2 is pushed into a rarefied stratosphere exceeding the service ceiling of any other combat flight sim I've flown.

Mountainous wilderness ranges and dry desert scrubland have been reproduced in such eye-popping detail that flying NOE (nap-of-the-earth) missions creates an unparalleled illusion of realism and speed. The 3Dfx-enhanced aircraft are equally impressive. The pilot and CP/G (copilot/gunner) are visible through the chopper's transparent canopy, and flashy weapons releases are a treat to behold from any of the external views. Extras include full-color dynamic light-sourcing, arcing-missile smoke trails, and one of the nicest-looking virtual cockpits I've ever hunkered my g-suit into.

A rocket salvo can kill night-vision as well as your enemies (non-3Dfx).

The highly sophisticated realism settings are fully configurable and include such advanced flight dynamics as transitional lift, ground/altitude effects, and realistic collective operation. As battalion commander, you are responsible for issuing task orders, designating navigation routes, and performing weapon load-outs on four separate flights of helicopters. You can alter the waypoints of any sortie, or place yourself in the lead chopper of the flight that drew the best mission. Two new birds have been added, so you can now transport troops in a UH-60L Blackhawk or perform recon missions in an OH-58D Kiowa Warrior—if blowing the crap out of enemy targets in the trusty Longbow starts to get boring.

The game's excellent new dynamic mission generator churns out countless battle scenarios and strikes in both of the offered theaters—the National Training Center (NTC) in Fort Irwin, California, and an imaginary Azerbaijani/Iranian conflict in the Persian Gulf. Enemy skill levels, campaign length, and starting advantage are all fully adjustable at the beginning of any hostilities. LB2 also offers single-mission and instant-action components, as well as comprehensive training modules for each of the simulation's three helicopters.

Longbow 2's high degree of adjustability makes it surprisingly accessible. Rookie Rotor Heads will appreciate the advanced computerized systems that fly the aircraft virtually unaided, while hardened sim-veterans can test their abilities with the game's extremely high levels of realism. Performing successful nighttime missions with authentic Fire Control Radar and TADS (Target Acquisition and Designation System) toggled on can provide an extraordinary challenge for any Top Gun. Extensive multiplayer enhancements have also been included with this release: Cooperative and head-to-head play via a LAN (four players), Internet, modem, or serial cable (two players) take full advantage of LB2's dynamic campaign engine.

The only aspects of the game I can find to grouse about are its heavy system requirements (P133 with 200MB of free HD space)

target (3Dfx-enhanced).

and its rather jumbled and confusing 240-page manual. Pretty small potatoes, really, when you consider that Longbow 2 ranks as the most visually appealing, realistic, and immersive flight experience outside of a bona fide military simulator.

LONGBOW 2

GAMEPLAY:	A
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	A+
SOUND CHECK:	A
MULTIPLAYER:	A

A OVERALL

Combat sims don't get any better than this.

DEVELOPER:	Origin Systems
PUBLISHER	Electronic Arts 800 245-4525
WEB:	www.origin.ea.com
PLATFORM	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P133, 16MB RAM, 200MB HD, 2MB PCI SVGA, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED	P200, 32MB RAM, 370MB HD, 3Dfx card
STREET PRICE:	$60

▼ Select the advanced flight model for increased maneuverability. The casual mode eliminates so many features that it can actually be more difficult to fly efficiently ▼ Take full advantage of the chopper's advanced aeronautics and computerized autopilot. Many missions can be flown without ever touching the stick ▼ When you come upon a large enemy installation, take out the radar and SAM sites first. The AAA, artillery, and tanks can be leisurely picked off from a safe distance once this is done ▼ Hit the U key (Upfront display) at the start of each mission to assist in identifying targets and avoiding friendly-fire casualties ▼ Don't waste Hellfires on artillery targets. Your guns can eradicate them quite handily.

CART Precision Racing

By Andy Mahood

The Win 95 of racing sims

Whoa...*The Win 95 of racing sims?* Is that a *good* thing? Well, yes and no. If you're one of those people who's had nary a glitch since upgrading, then you'll take it to mean that CART Precision Racing is the greatest thing since IndyCar Racing II. If you're like the rest of us, you'll probably be a little worried. A few of you will be very worried.

At first glance, CART PR will wow even the most jaded racing-sim vet. The menu interface is in an attractive Web-page format (a precursor to Win 98?), and the sheer number of "pages" you can click to hints at the game's depth. There's an exhaustively detailed garage menu where you can tweak almost every bolt on the car or enlist the aid of race engineer Nigel Bennett to set it up for you. Mimicking real-world practice, there's also a real time data-acquisition and telemetry module designed by Pi Research that's a treat to work with.

You get diagrams of all 17 tracks on the '97 CART calendar (with a few FMV track tours), as well as bios on each of the 25 licensed drivers who participated in this release. (Michael Andretti is a notable absentee, but his seat has been amusingly filled by team boss Carl Haas!) ESPN's Bob Varsha is also on hand to provide race commentary. Multiplayer options (four-player Internet, eight-player network, and two-player modem), driving aids, realism options, race lengths, and graphic settings are also fully configurable from a dashboard-like pull-down menu.

Selecting accelerated graphics on my P133 with a 4MB Screamin' 3D card resulted in a pop-in so severe that forward visibility was cut to 100 yards. I ultimately had to settle for windowed (and non-accelerated) SVGA just to reach a modest 10 fps—though that may be due to the fact that Rendition boards don't do D3D too well, so with different cards, performance may vary. CART's track and car renderings are exceptionally smooth and detailed if you have the CPU muscle, but expect to be turning a lot of things off if you don't.

Once on the track, you may well be delighted with the many extra features Microsoft has implemented: head-panning that turns your view with the

steering wheel, wheelspin and brake lock-ups, blue flags, fully animated pit stops, support for force-feedback controllers, and the best engine growl and gear change *ka-chunk* you'll ever hear on a racing sim.

Unfortunately, the physics model is nowhere near as impressive. There's no discernible gravity effect (the cars won't roll down hills, for example), and the adhesion and car-damage characteristics are woefully off target. I was able to set a lap record at Fontana, hit the wall at 230 mph, and then

This isn't what they taught in Driver's Ed.

turn around and set an even faster time going reverse track with a car biased for left turns and missing its front wing! Definitely something wrong with *that* picture.

Microsoft has accomplished a great deal with CART PR. The game is fun to drive once a playable frame rate is achieved—no small feat—but the sub-standard car model will need a lot of work if Microsoft expects to become more than just a small speck in IndyCar II's mirrors.

CART PRECISION RACING

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS :	B-
SOUND CHECK:	A
OVERALL	**B-**
MULTIPLAYER:	A-

A premature release of what will likely become a superb racing game.

DEVELOPER:	Terminal Reality
PUBLISHER:	Microsoft
PHONE:	800-426-9400
WEB:	www.microsoft.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P60, 16MB RAM, 30MB HD, 4x CD ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P200, 32MB RAM, 100MB HD, 3D card
STREET PRICE:	$55

▼ Switch the sound option to 8-bit to gain some valuable frames per second out of the game. Also, typing **frame** while in the car will display a fps counter. You may find this to be a better tuning tool than Nigel Bennett's full-service garage, as it helps you gain a more important type of speed. ▼ Lose the kid glove approach to driving that you may have used with Indy II. These cars can handle abrupt cranks of the wheel without breaking traction.

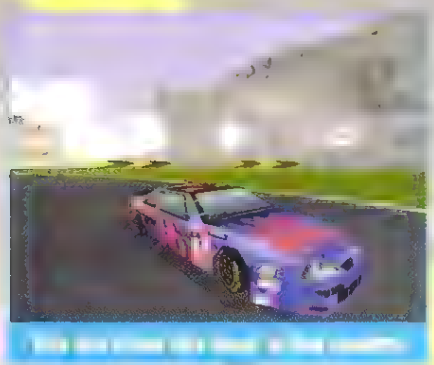
PLAY THE DEMO ON PC GAMES EXE CD-ROM

Andretti Racing

By Andy Mahood

Tire-spinning fun

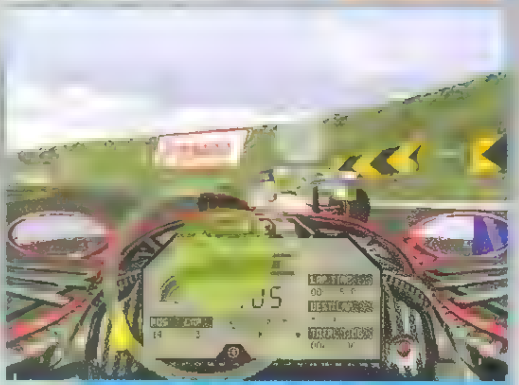
Throughout his career, Mario Andretti has managed to win at every level of motor sport in which he's competed. It doesn't matter to this North American racing legend whether it's IndyCars, Formula One, or NASCAR, because the result is almost always the same: champagne-soaked. Electronic Arts is hoping for similar cross platform success with the newly released PC port of its popular console game Andretti Racing.



The partnership between Andretti and EA dates back to 1990's "Mario Andretti's Racing Challenge." This unique PC racer allowed gamers to move up from dirt-track sprint cars to exotic F1 machines by using accumulated race earnings to finance their careers. It was a clever role-playing twist that's partially carried over to Andretti Racing.

As with the PlayStation and Saturn versions of the game, you can elect to drive IndyCars or stock cars in either exhibition races or career mode. With the career option, you can accept offers to drive for larger, better-funded teams if you're able to consistently post good results. Rather like earning medals in a combat flight sim, these offers are more for the ego than anything else.

The driving model in Andretti Racing ranks very much at the arcade end of the realism scale—anyone who's turned a lap or two in a Papyrus racing sim is unlikely to be bowled over by the unsophisticated physics. Both the stock car and IndyCar possess a slot-car stick and rocket-ship acceleration, so it's quite possible to win races from the back of the grid, as long as you have a reasonably solid setup and know which way the corners go. A cursory garage menu permits changes to your car's wings, tire compound, and gear ratios, but coarse adjustments are usually required to noticeably impact the handling. Maximum race lengths are limited to a couple dozen laps, so race strategy is rarely a huge factor in the game.

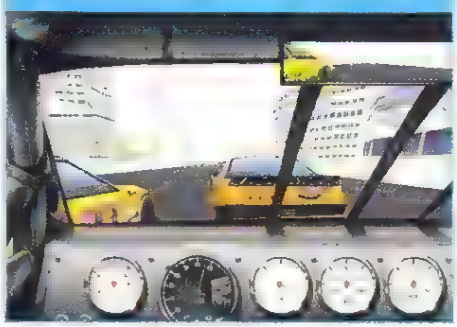


AR's 16 tracks are mostly fantasy road-circuits, with a few real-life venues (Vancouver, Toronto, Surfer's Paradise) tossed in for good measure. Any 4MB 3D accelerator card will turn out striking texture-mapped screens (complete with lens flare and fog effects), but gamers with 3Dfx-fueled cards will really see their pixels kicked into overdrive. Scenery pop-in is a problem on slower machines (anything less than a P200, realistically), but if you've got the heat in your tower to handle 'em, the graphics are well worth the price of admission.

The same can't be said for the sound. Engine-note and tire-squeal effects are substandard, and the short arcade-music playlist doesn't take long to begin grating on the nerves. ESPN's Bob Jenkins and Derek Daly take turns introducing each championship round as well as interviewing the Andrettis (Mario with sons Michael and Jeff) for a special "Racing School" feature. These interviews range from informative to unintentionally comic. (The clip where Jeff tries to explain apexes is positively embarrassing to listen to.)

Modem, serial, and IPX-network multiplay (for up to eight players) is fully implemented in this release, as is support for force-feedback steering devices. EA deserves kudos for taking the high road with Andretti Racing, squeezing all the PC enhancements it could into the game before it slapped on the shrinkwrap. I already own a copy of the PlayStation version, and am happy not to have wound up with the same game in a bigger box.

A whole lotta pushing and shoving going on.



ANDRETTI RACING

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS :	B-
SOUND CHECK:	C
OVERALL	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	B

One of the better console-racing ports on the shelves.

DEVELOPER	Stormfront Studios
PUBLISHER	Electronic Arts 800 245 4525 www ea com
	DOS/Win 95 CD P133, 16MB RAM, 115MB HD, 2MB video card, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED	P200, 32MB RAM, 3Dfx card, 8x CD ROM drive
STREET PRICE	$50

▼ These are very thirsty machines that require fuel stops every four or five laps. Monitor your fuel level closely and stretch each pit stop as long as you can to gain a one-stop advantage over the computer controlled cars. ▼ Take the soft-compound tires every time out. They may wear faster, but they're more than sufficient to handle the short stints between the obligatory fuel top-ups. Even with damage turned on, you can use the other cars to slow yourself down in the braking zones. Practice the technique until you can do it without wrecking too seriously—and then go win yourself some races from the back row.

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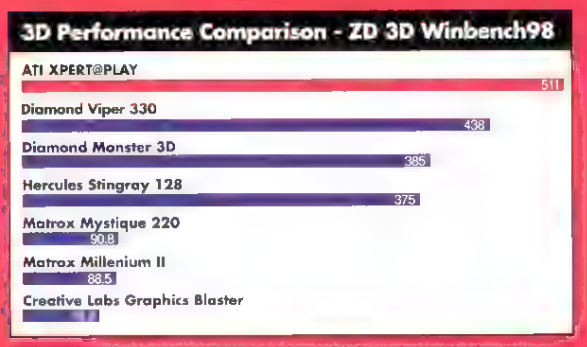

Tested on Pentium II MMX-300MHz/64MB/512 cache/Windows 95-OSR2/Test Mode: 640x480x16bppp@75Hz
Tested using Driver Version: ATI XPERT@Play 4.31 H14P/Diamond Viper 330 4.10.01.0011 Matrox Mystique/Millenium 4.03.3700/Diamond Monster 3D 4.03.00.2108/Hercules Stingray 128 4.10.00.2108/Creative Labs 5464 4.03.00.2147

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Madden NFL 98

By Willem Knibbe

No Super Bowl this year

Madden NFL 98, the second foray onto the PC for this proud and storied football franchise, bests its predecessor but bumps its helmet on the bar Electronic Arts' other sports titles have raised so high.

EA's NBA, NHL, and FIFA 98 feature big, polygonal players with their faces texture-mapped, and all the titles have 3Dfx support. Madden offers 3Dfx support only via a patch (on its Web site and our CD-ROM), so each stadium looks great and weather effects like rain are sharp, but the small player sprites just get nicer numbers. That's not to say Madden's motion-captured players look horrible. They don't—they're just not leaps and bounds above last year's version.

Whoops, the defense dove too soon to break up the pass.

Most of the basic sim stuff is here—like general-manager mode, robust stat-tracking, trade and create players, and such but if you're a hardcore football stathead or require an editable playbook, look to ABC's Monday Night Football. This game is about controlling action on the field, not managing the off-season.

Four-button joystick support helps provide a control range that approaches the PlayStation's. You can dive, spin, speed-burst, and even high-step on offense. Each receiver also gets his own button, so you don't have to cycle through them. Passing is much tougher, in part because EA quadrupled the sensitivity, so lobs (a quick tap) are really lobs and bullet passes (hold the button) really zing.

Running is much improved, mirroring the trend in the NFL. The linemen open nice holes, and after a spin through the initial wave of defense, you're off to the races. You'll need to mix and match the run and pass and use all your football wiles to combat the improved AI. Defenses evaluate offensive threats and flow to fill gaps in the D, take different angles to the ball carrier, and react on the fly both to what their teammates and opponents are doing on any given play. Receivers change routes, and running backs stay in to block blitzing linebackers.

It's in head-to-head play that Madden excels. Alas, EA didn't and won't get TCP/IP coaching-mode support in this year, despite it being on the Remote Play menu. Still, LAN and modem gameplay are available. Modem play was pretty smooth, but the interface could use a little tweaking. For instance, you can't backspace when you chat; and when the game ends, it just ends. There's no option to chat with your opponent or immediately rematch—you have to reconnect to play again. Last year, you could replay, but the game would run at about five frames per second. This year, they got around it by not letting you redo at all.

It looks like Napoleon Kaufman's going to be stuffed at the line.

Madden does make you feel like you're on the field hearing the quarterback bark out the signals, defenders call audibles, the crowd roar, the pads pop, and the players grunt on the big hits. Of course, Pat Summerall and John himself provide commentary. John also does a scouting report on all 30 NFL teams, plus busts out his telestrator to break down offensive and defensive formations.

It's a nice addition to a game I'll be playing all year long, despite its flaws (some of which, such as lack of Direct3D support, will be amended with a forthcoming patch). And EA goes a long way toward keeping Madden fresh with weekly roster updates on its Web site, plus a multiplayer matchup feature (**www.ea.com/multiplayer_matchup**). I just can't wait 'til next year, when development shifts from Stormfront to Tiburon, the Madden PlayStation developer (see GameWire).

Pick your touchdown celebration: after you score, you can spike the ball, spike it between your legs, dance, or box à la Ken Norton Jr.

MADDEN NFL 98

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	C+
SOUND CHECK:	B+
OVERALL	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	B-

Better than last year's, but lots of room for improvement.

PUBLISHER	Electronic Arts 800-543-9778
WEB:	www.easports.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P133, 16MB RAM, 75MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P200, 32MB RAM, 270MB HD, 8x CD-ROM drive, gamepad
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ The spin is key to the running game. It's the best way to get through the hole and change direction. ▼ The HB Trap play in the Single formation works well. Let your pulling guard pick off the linebacker, then cut to the outside once you've passed the line of scrimmage. Mix this in with the Sweep and Flag plays from the same formation to keep your opponent guessing.

PLAY THE DEMO ON PC GAMES EXE CD-ROM

Steel Panthers III

War is hell, but this is heaven

By Daniel Morris

Gary Grigsby's SSI design team continues to roll out superb wargames with the reliability of a tank factory. Steel Panthers II: Modern Battles was a stunning upgrade of the quintessential World War II turn-based tactical system, projecting the

game engine into the modern technological era. While SPIII isn't quite the forward leap over its predecessor that Modern Battles was, it's still a valuable and engrossing strategy game in its own right.

The thing you'll immediately notice is the sheer amount of stuff. The complete military capability of 40 nations has been accurately rendered, and the volume and variety of the armed forces available for play make SPIII the most comprehensive wargaming experience yet offered. From infantry platoons to Dragon anti tank crews, scout buggies to TOW jeeps, reconnaissance APCs to main battle tanks, helicopters to jet aircraft to naval warships—it's all here, every piece of iron that man has thrown into combat since 1939.

There are 40 scenarios and 6 campaigns to sink into, from WWII and its comparatively low-tech tank duels to speculative action as far ahead as the year 2000, when the lethality of conventional warfare is at a fever pitch that Rommel could not have imagined.

There are three WWII campaigns: North Africa is a very refined, "classic" chess match on a level playing field; Stalingrad 1942 is a campaign fought as much against the terrain as the enemy; and Market Garden 1944 is a re-creation of the urban struggle for Western Europe following D Day.

Vietnam 1965–70, my favorite of the six campaigns, stands in stark contrast to WWII North Africa. It pits wildly different armies against each other in a shapeless battlefield, where berserk flexibility is required for victory.

NATO 1988 is a "what-if" look at a modern conventional World War III in Europe, and Holy War 2000 (the most challenging) is a look ahead at a hypothetical showdown between Israel and a joint Syria-Egypt invasion. Holy War's first scenario begins with a five minute artillery barrage against Israeli defensive positions along the Syrian frontier. It's humbling, and it lets you know you're in for a rough fight.

The actual game engine hasn't changed noticeably, which is both good and bad. It's good because the Steel Panthers engine is arguably the best turn-based tactical combat system yet devised. But it's bad because no progress has been made in some areas that could benefit from rethinking. Artillery, particularly the coordination of direct and indirect fire attacks, needs to be streamlined. Air units need to be rethought as well, as they're still only tangential to ground combat. In light of the Persian Gulf War, airpower needs to be made a much more crucial (perhaps *the* crucial) element of victory.

These concerns aside, SPIII is still a mandatory acquisition for turn-based strategy buffs. And if you're one of those real-time jockeys who has yet to discover this brilliant engine, now's the time to get on board.

The British Invasion

SPIII includes a fascinating scenario/campaign designer that gives you total control over maps, elevation, objectives, and combatant forces. You'll find our scenario on this month's PC Games.exe and at **www.pcgames.com.**

This scenario postulates a fierce battle for control of the *PC Games* building in San Mateo, California. It seems that Senior Reviews Editor (and limey) Rob Smith heard one too many disparaging jokes about the English and has called in a British invasion force to seize the building. US forces advance to meet it for a violent showdown in a highly [sub]urban area. The winner is the side who controls the *PC Games* building victory hexes at the end of the battle.

PLAY THE DEMO ON PC GAMES.EXE CD-ROM

STEEL PANTHERS III

GAMEPLAY: B+
GETTING STARTED: B
GRAPHICS: B
SOUND CHECK: B-

B+ OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: B+

SP maintains its awesome level of detail, simplicity, and playability.

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DOS CD
P60, 8MB RAM, 38MB HD, SVGA, 2x CD ROM drive
P75, 16MB RAM, 4x CD ROM drive
$50

▼ Support tank advances with light armored vehicles along the flanks of the formation. Let them uncover any unsuppressed enemy units and absorb their attacks, sparing your main battle tanks. ▼ As the US commander in Vietnam, consider burning infantry units as scouts when you're unsure about uncharted jungle terrain. These platoons will invariably be lost, but they often provide valuable early warning that can give you time to call in air support before any nasty surprises.

Chaos Island

Spielberg strategy

Jurassic Park contained a hilarious side bit where we saw the vast stockpile of merchandising sitting in a gift shop. Books, coffee mugs, T-shirts, stuffed toys...and did we forget computer games? *The Lost World*, one of this summer's blockbusters, has spawned Chaos Island, a junior real-time strategy game intended for younger fans of the movie.

Chaos Island finds you back on the secluded isle of dinosaurs. Your team includes Ian Malcolm and several other characters from the film, with the voice talents of Jeff Goldblum, Julianne Moore, Vince Vaughn, and Richard Attenborough. Your job, through 12 increasingly difficult missions, is to establish base camps and convert supplies into resources for harvesting dinosaur eggs.

Set up a base camp quickly; then you can forage for supplies.

As you hatch eggs, you'll begin building a small army of dinosaurs you can then send up against the rapacious dinos being controlled by the game's bad guys—a posse of hunters out to smash you and claim the island for themselves. Each team member has a special skill, and each dinosaur offers unique advantages in gameplay (Richard Schiff is a deadshot, big dinos can scare away smaller ones, and so on).

In terms of gameplay, it's rudimentary and won't be very satisfying for anyone who's played C&C. Simple as it is, Chaos Island is helped along by a very thorough and engaging tutorial that makes it a snap for younger kids to figure out (and also eliminates the need for packaged documentation).

Attractive, if occasionally blocky, graphics and some nice sound work and voices make Chaos Island a DreamWorks standard: high production values are mandatory. And the game's built-in audience won't be disappointed. Just don't spring for the bucks if you're not going to be happy with elementary real-time strategy. Chaos Island is basics only. —*Daniel Morris*

CHAOS ISLAND

GAMEPLAY:	C+
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	B+

B- OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

Dinomanagement for young fans of the big flick.

PUBLISHER:	DreamWorks Interactive 310-234-7000
WEB:	www.dreamworksgames.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P60, 48MB RAM, 20MB HD, SVGA, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P90, 16MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$40

AHx-1

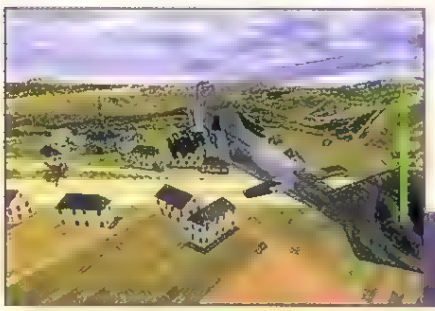
Putting the sim in simple

I don't know about you, but my wildest fantasy isn't to fly a real helicopter. I don't sit at home in my ThunderSeat with a 21-inch monitor before me, a flightstick on each armrest, playing Hind or Longbow. I just want to fly around and blow things up like I did in the classic Comanche: Maximum Overkill. In the mold of Extreme Assault and G Police, AHx-1 is a game that will by no means set the sim world sizzling, but it offers distracting enough fare for those who want to fly the chopper around the block for the occasional firebombing.

The Cold War may be over, but bad guys still abound. Unfortunately, the world's totalitarian dictators aren't exactly a stone's throw away from the US, the "world's peacekeeper." To covertly stake out these hostile territories, the revolutionary, top-secret AHx-1 Viper helicopter was designed. A Stealth bomber would drop it into enemy territory, where, with its retractable rotors, it'd fly forth on its mission.

The game sports 30 different missions that take you from Libya to Colombia, where you engage in air-to-air and air-to-ground combat, as well as some 24-player action over a LAN or Kali, if you've got the network or modem.

Using actual aerial photos (and MMX technology), the graphics are quite impressive, with very detailed terrain. The soundtrack, while not overwhelmingly impressive, is decent enough to waste third-world dictators by.



Along with the typical air-to-air combat, you'll find yourself in plenty of missions requiring air-to-ground tactics.

You also get some of the most unrealistic physics since...well, Comanche. This may not be bad, depending on how you look at it. But if you're one of those people who memorizes things like the armor thickness of everything Boeing/Sikorsky, you'll want to pass on this passable action flyer. —*Shane Mooney*

AHX-1

GAMEPLAY:	C+
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	C+

C+ OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: B

It's all about action, not realism, in this quick-and-dirty chopper sim.

DEVELOPER	Pixel Multimedia
PUBLISHER	GT Interactive 800-469-5961
WEB	www.gtgames.com
PLATFORM	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES	P166, 16MB RAM, SVGA, 2x CD ROM drive
RECOMMENDED	32MB RAM, MMX, 4x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$50

"Groundbreaking gaming at its best: fast, challenging, and beautiful. It's beyond recommended."

"★★★★★" – Next Generation

"An innovative blend of action and strategy."

– PC Gamer

"This game is a winner; Go buy it!"

– Adrenaline Vault

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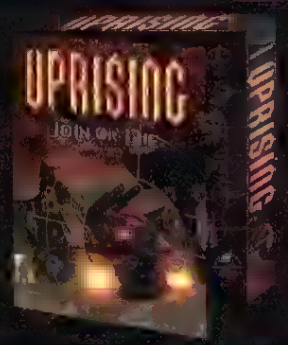
WWW.3DO.COM



IN STORES NOW!

CYCLONE STUDIOS

TEEN T AGES 13+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PC CD-ROM

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UPRISING™

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Why wait? This month, the word is "level skip," and we've got five ways for you to get ahead in life—well, your virtual life, at least. There are also a few end-sequences, power-ups...mmm, boy. It's looking good.

G-Police

At the main screen (where you select New Game, Load Game, etc.), type one of the following passwords to warp to the corresponding level:

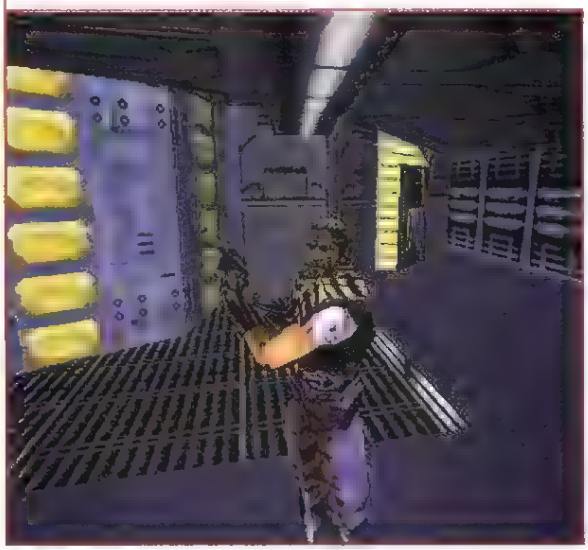
1 MADGAV
2 DOLMAN
3 SONAGAV
4 ACEDUF
5 JOJOGUN
6 WENSKI
7 SAEGGY
8 MAZMAN
9 DAZMAN
10 DELUCS
11 ANDOOOO
12 KIMBCHS
13 ANDYMAC
14 YERMAN
15 OLLIEB
16 THEYOLK
17 TONYMASH
18 ANDYCROW
19 BIONIC
20 TSLATER
21 IAINTHOD
22 JONRITZ
23 CLAIREC
24 STEVEBOT
25 ANGUSF
26 EUANLEC
27 EDFIRE
28 STUBOMB
29 THONBOY
30 JIMMAC
31 PUGGER
32 ROSSCO
33 CAKEBOY
34 NIKNAK
35 SAGLORD

Shadows of the Empire

Where you enter your name:

Use the name **R Testers ROCK** to play any level.

Use the name **_Credits** (_ indicates a space) to watch the end sequence. Select Hoth to play.



Oddworld: Abe's Odyssee

Use the following key-combos at the main screen:

To see all the movies, hold down Shift, and, using the arrow keys, type up, left, right, left, right, left, right, down.

To jump to any level, hold down Shift, and, using the arrow keys, type down, right, left, right, left, right, left, up.

SWIV 3D

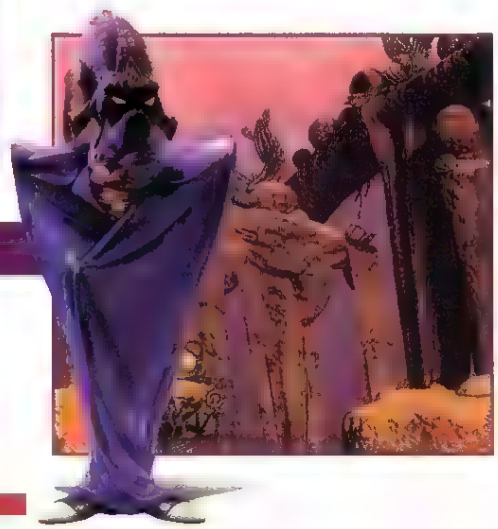
Enter **FromSCIWithLove** at the pilot-name prompt (case sensitive), and the pilot-name prompt will come up again. However, the name you type in the second time will be a "cheat-enabled" pilot. This will enable a new cheat option in the main menu, letting you jump to any level in the game. While in this mode, if you hit F11 or F12 during a game, you can get all available power-ups.

Croc

During the game or at the Island screen, type:

argolife: Gives you infinite lives.

argoskip: Lets you choose any level.



Incubation

If you've played Incubation, you know those damn Scay'Ger are no pushovers. They're a tough, diverse lot, with plenty of uglies to slice you silly. We asked Blue Byte for a little tactical advice; here are some of their top tips for beating the beasties in this action/strategy slaughterfest. (For the complete guide to winning at Incubation—including more monster tips, weapons tips, and a slew of general tips—visit **www.pcgames.com**.*)*

Ray'Ther

The first opponent you'll face, and the most common Scay'Ger in the game. When you first start, you'll find that the Ray'Ther's claws can easily rip an inexperienced marine to shreds, so never engage in close combat with it. Fortunately, it's pretty stupid, so by moving in pairs and allowing soldiers on defensive mode to take out any attacking Ray'Ther, you should be fine. It has about six movement-points per turn, so calculate the distance accurately, and you should never need to get up close. As your marines become stronger and better protected, the Ray'Ther poses much less of a threat. But don't ignore it: you'll still need to use valuable ammo and movement points to deal with it on later levels.

TOP TIP: If dealing with an infinite number of Ray'Ther pouring out of a vent, try to move forward with weapons equipped with bayonets (e.g., Advanced Combat Guns or Standard Assault Rifles) so you can surround the vents and take out any new opponents without wasting untold ammo. This frees up your other soldiers to complete the mission while you cover them. It's also an excellent way to build up experience with very little effort!

Ee'Ther

This Scay'Ger is one of the hardest creatures to beat in the game. It's semi-transparent, has loads of armor, and, worst of all, can regenerate all of its health points at the end of each turn. Needless to say, the only way to deal with this git is to give it everything you've got in one turn and pray that it flies apart before you do! One of the better tactics is to let it get right next you, shoot it as many times as you can, but save enough movement points for defensive-mode activation. This way, even if it doesn't die during your turn, each time it takes a swipe at you during its turn (and before his regeneration), you can shoot it again and more than likely kill it.

TOP TIP: If you've got standard armor (don't try this technique with anything less), gang up on the Ee'Ther with at least three soldiers and let her rip! One other method is to let a Ee'Ther get up close to one of your marines, protect that marine by firing the Plasma Gun's energy field around him, and let the Ee'Ther waste its time swiping while you whittle it away.

Gore'Ther

The Gore'Ther has deadly claws and impenetrable front armor. This means that any attack on it should concentrate on either leading it onto mines or maneuvering behind it to attack its weaker back armor. It only has two movement points, so there should be no problem out-running it—but avoid being cornered, as one swipe will reduce you to jam. The best tactic is to use one marine as bait and lure the Gore'Ther toward him. While doing this, use your other marines to move to the rear of the Gore'Ther and, as soon as it turns to face the bait, move in quickly with weapons blazing.

TOP TIP: Even though the Gore'Ther only has two movement points, it only takes it one movement point to attack you diagonally, so think about where you place your marines when trying to lure it toward you. And don't ever get close to one.

Cy'Coo

Apart from turning to face you, the Cy'Coo is unable to move. It is, however, able to launch projectile attacks from a great distance, and it's protected by impenetrable armor. So, how do you kill it? Simple (well, sort of): when it fires at you, it has to open up its "head" to do so. If you can position soldiers within range and set them on defensive mode, they stand a chance of reacting fast enough to inflict damage on the Cy'Coo and, ultimately, destroy it.

TOP TIP: The Cy'Coo takes one turn to lock onto the spot that it will fire at next. This means that, as long as you never leave any of your troops on a spot that they occupied on the previous turn, you can't get hit. Another cool thing to do (though bloody hard to organize!) is to lead other Scay'Ger who are pursuing you onto previously occupied spots, and let the Cy'Coo do your work for you!

Pyr'Coo

The Pyr'Coo is an expert at long-range weapon use and carries a gun with a wide-spray capability that can devastate grouped marines. It also has strength, armor, and speed. The only good news is that the Pyr'Coo can only fire once per round—just don't get in its way!

TOP TIP: Though the Pyr'Coo's armor is quite strong, you should find that a couple of shots from a Rapid-Fire Machine Gun or a Double Fire are enough to kill it. If you can, gang up on it with two marines or more, protected by cover. Step in, shoot, retreat. Repeat.

Is a certain game driving you nuts? Can't figure out how to kill an enemy, solve a puzzle, or find a key? We can help! Let us know what games you'd like to see cheats for by contacting PC Games, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd. Ste. 700, San Mateo, CA 94404; fax: 650-349-7482; email: ccohen@pcgames.com. Due to the high volume of mail, we can't reply to most letters personally, but we'll do our best to print cheats/tips for games that get the most requests.

Voodoo II Ready to Roll

Whether you're ready or not, 3Dfx has taken the wraps off its Voodoo II chipset. Not content to let competing technology from PowerVR, Microsoft, and Rendition nip too closely at its heels, 3Dfx has cleared its reference technology and drivers for card makers like Diamond and Creative to develop their own Voodoo II–based 3D boards. By the time you read this, some of them may even have been announced for spring. Although specifics about these products will have to wait, what we can do is fill you in on what changes 3Dfx has made, and what base-performance increases card makers will be working with.

The big performance news for gamers is texture memory. Voodoo I came with one texture-memory unit (TMU); Voodoo II has two TMUs built in. Whereas most Voodoo boards currently use 2MB of frame-buffer memory and 2MB of dedicated texture memory (Canopus' Pure3D is the odd man out with 4MB of texture memory), the Voodoo II reference technology doubles that to 4MB of texture memory. Card makers will be free to increase the available memory at their leisure.

What do two TMUs mean for gamers? 3Dfx demonstrated an early Voodoo II board running GLQuake on an NT 4.0 system to *PC Games*. Although the drivers were Voodoo I originals, frame rates of 95 fps to 98 fps at 640-by-480 resolution were attained and held. Optimized drivers running on Win 95 would probably turn in even higher numbers. Another big change is that Voodoo II can scale up to higher screen resolutions. At 800-by-600, GLQuake was running at around 77 fps. GLQuake in 1024-by-768 is also possible, but Voodoo II boards will likely need 8MB of texture memory to get there. 3Dfx couldn't say yet what the two TMUs will do for Direct3D games.

The fact that Voodoo I drivers were being used for the demonstration bodes well for anyone with an established collection of Voodoo-supported games—it suggests that they'll be compatible with the newer chipset. But the Voodoo II drivers will also include other goodies for gamers and developers alike. In addition to two TMUs, Voodoo II will be optimized to take better advantage of Pentium II CPUs for even faster speeds than those demonstrated to *PC Games*. Although this is likely an overture to Intel's efforts to create a Pentium II–based arcade business, PC game developers will likely make use of the opportunity to enhance their latest games—going beyond the existing Glide protocol to take full advantage of the two TMUs.

3Dfx is claiming that Voodoo II will more than double the pixel-fill rates, also a major

Older Voodoo I games, such as MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries (above) and Descent (right), will be compatible with Voodoo II.

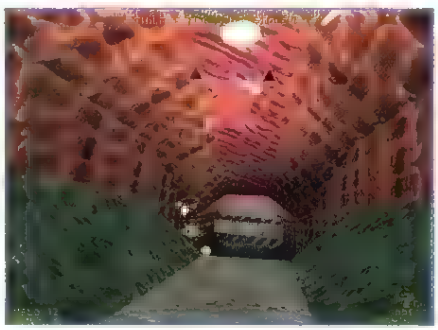
contributor to higher frame rates and resolutions. Since pixel-fill rates are generally tied to processor speed, having a faster Pentium or Pentium II will likely make a difference in 3D performance. The PowerVR partners have been barking about better fill rates and larger resolutions for a year—the Voodoo II is a substantial return volley.

3Dfx says there are approximately 15 game developers working on Voodoo II–specific versions of their games. Of that number, Voodoo II Quake, Quake II, and Unreal are expected soon, says Andy Keane, 3Dfx vice president of marketing. Expect a longer list of games to be announced by the end of the first quarter of '98, Keane says.

For now, if you're thinking about scrapping your existing Voodoo board or waiting until next year before buying a 3D accelerator, you might reconsider. The first Voodoo II boards will likely be $200 or more—still pretty pricey for an add-on, considering you may see Voodoo I boards selling for under $100 by then. If you already own a 3Dfx-based card, chances are you'll want to hang onto it for awhile. If you're still on the hunt for 3D video, all this Voodoo II news is likely to drive prices on existing Voodoo boards further down, especially after the new models arrive.

And there's Rendition's new V2000 series chipset. So far, Diamond's Stealth II, based on the lower cost–performance V2100, is looking like a winner (see Hardware Spotlight, this issue). But so far, we haven't seen a comprehensive demonstration of the brawnier V2200 Vérité II to determine whether it can compare in performance to the Voodoo II. Also, no mainstream card maker has announced support for the V2200 at press time.

If you have to have 3D now but are dead set on waiting for a Voodoo II accelerator, spring for the STB Velocity, Diamond Viper, or Diamond Stealth II. All come with exceptional 2D and Direct 3D performance. You get great frames-per-second in D3D games today and a powerful 2D video card, to which you can add the Voodoo II pass-through accelerator board later. *—George T. Chronis*



HARDWARE HALL OF FAME

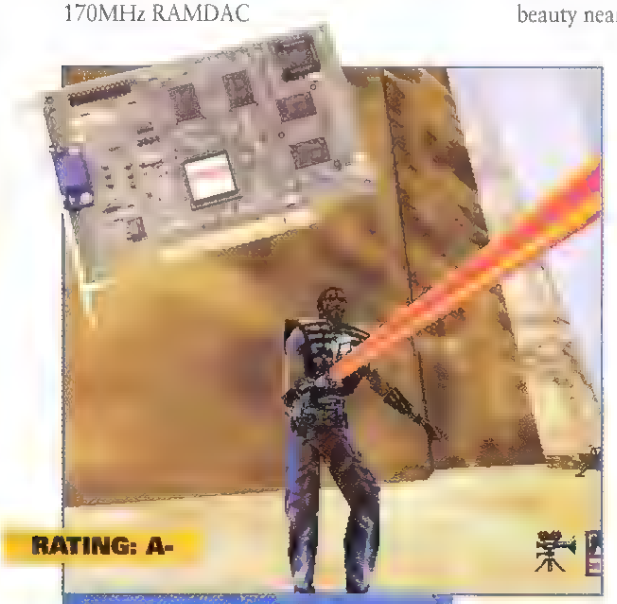
Wondering what hardware to buy to get the best game machine for your money? It's easy: just check *PC Games'* running list of our top hardware recommendations. Each month, we'll update the Hall of Fame as we review new products.

CATEGORY	PRODUCT	DETAILS	OUR RATING
PC	Falcon Mach V	Falcon Northwest; 800-258-6778; approx. $4,000	A
Monitor	Optiquest V775 17-inch	ViewSonic; 800-888-8583; approx. $600	A
CD-ROM drive	FX240	Mitsumi; 714-648-7861; approx. $199	A-
Sound card	AWE64	Creative Labs; 800-998-5227; $129	A
Speakers	ACS55 Power Gaming System	Altec Lansing; 800-258-3288; approx. $150	A
Joystick	F-16 Combatstick	CH Products; 619-598-2518; $69.95	A+
Gamepad	SideWinder Gamepad	Microsoft; 206-882-8080; $39	A+
Modem	SupraExpress 336i SP	Diamond; 800-727-8772; approx. $125	A
Graphics card	Stealth 3D 2000 Pro	Diamond; 800-727-8772; approx. $160	A
Key add-ons	Pure3D	Canopus; 888-868-2533; approx. $165	A
	Monster Sound 3D	Diamond; 800-727-8772; approx. $199	A

Diamond Stealth II S220

Gamers who have already popped for a 3Dfx Voodoo-based accelerator are likely to feel a little post-purchase nausea in the face of Diamond's brawny, budget-priced Stealth II S220. I know I did. In the current field of 2D/3D accelerator cards, you just can't get more for your money.

For under $120 retail, you get 2D and 3D acceleration on a single 4MB card employing Rendition's re-engineered V2100 chip, which incorporates the 3D graphics power of the original Vérité chip with an added hardware triangle setup for enhanced speed. Toss in a 170MHz RAMDAC for refresh rates of up to 75MHz at 1208-by-1024, plus 65K-color resolution, and you have a potent all-in-one PC graphics solution.



RATING: A-

The Stealth II handles Shadows of the Empire just fine.

Everything is hot in the specs, but this board also looks good on the benches. It scored 85.6 on 3D WinMarks in WinBench 97, which drops it almost exactly between the high-end 3Dfx Voodoo and the original Vérité accelerators.

The card boasts support for Direct3D, RedLine, and Speedy APIs under Win 95, in addition to OpenGL support under Windows NT. As for Win 95 OpenGL support, we're going to have to wait awhile. Performance in the bundled playable demos of Moto Racer, WipeOut, and Terracide was superb, with the brisk frame rates and smooth mip-mapping one expects from a Voodoo-based card.

Nonbundled products also looked great. LucasArts' Shadows of the Empire soared, although I had to disable fog effects; and Jedi Knight charged ahead in all its D3D graphic glory, even at 800-by-600 resolution. I was even more impressed when I booted Activision's 3D-accelerated Hexen II, thanks to a new Rendition patch. The update worked its magic on GLHexen II, adding speed and beauty nearing the 3Dfx-accelerated version.

Better yet, there's supposedly a new D3D patch floating around for Quake, which I haven't found yet.

The Stealth II utilities, on the other hand, brought me back to Earth. Diamond is normally known for exceptional utilities, but the refresh setup had an annoying habit of disappearing from the Desktop Properties screens, and the slider to alter screen resolution also oddly disappeared, leaving a blank space on the page.

If the Stealth II has a major flaw, it's that the Rendition chipset hasn't attracted as much direct support as the more popular Voodoo. Still, if your gaming tastes run to 3D titles tailored for Direct3D—a category that's rapidly expanding—the Stealth II S220 is currently the best price/performance value in 3D accelerators. (Diamond Multimedia; 800-727-8772; www.diamondmm.com; street $120) *—Bob Lindstrom*

HOW FAST IS IT?

Video Score: 180

**PC Games* Labs uses a standard Acer 200MHz Pentium as a baseline system for comparison, with baseline benchmarks of 100 in processor, video, and hard-drive categories. Computer systems are compared using WinBench 97.

This light, sturdy controller handles well.

Rage 3D

RATING: A

To nongamers, ThrustMaster may sound more like a character from *Boogie Nights* than a gaming-peripherals company, but its well-designed input devices—especially its flight controls—have made it a household name in the gaming world. Its latest gamepad continues this tradition.

The Rage 3D digital gamepad is one of the most comfortable gaming devices I've ever used. It's light, so it's easy to hold, but it's also sturdy, without any protrusions that could break off. The left hand controls the D-Pad, the motion-controlling device that can be set in either eight-direction 2D mode or omnidirectional 3D. The right hand accesses the six buttons that can be programmed with the ThrustMapper software for any gaming function.

There are right and left triggers both on the top and bottom of the Rage for handheld or tabletop play. It was nice to see tabletop play in a gamepad, but it's nowhere near as good as using a joystick on a flat surface.

Still, as an in-hand gaming device, the Rage is hard to beat. It's preconfigured for a couple dozen of the latest games, and the command scripts can be easily adapted for a game that's missing from the list. For example, it was all ready to go for Duke 3D, but I had to tweak Duke's script settings a bit for Tomb Raider.

The Rage 3D was a breeze to install and configure with the provided software: True plug-and-play is getting closer every day. And speaking of plug-and-play, the Rage 3D allows up to three other gamepads to be plugged in daisy-chain-style for some serious multiplay. (ThrustMaster; 503-615-3200; www.thrustmaster.com; street $40) *—Joel Strauch*

Something different, nothing special.

3D Striker

RATING: C-

You want buttons? The 3D Striker has buttons. This digital stick integrates a gaming keyboard designed for easy access to lots and lots of keys. As a result, instead of using a game-port connection, you plug the cable into the keyboard socket and your keyboard into the 3D Striker. An added utility configures your sound card and keyboard settings to avoid conflicts your system may encounter. The utility includes configurations for 10 games that could be problematic with the Striker, such as Duke Nukem 3D, Quake, Shadow Warrior, SkyNET, Blood, Descent II, Redneck Rampage, Tomb Raider, and Fate.

I wanted to try out the rudder feature of the handle and cranked up G-NOME, because everyone here at *PC Games* had taken their copies of Mech 2 home. My robot torso pivoted fine, but that's about all that went smoothly. I had trouble configuring the trigger button, and my mech went around in circles.

After a bit more configuration at the options screen, I was up and running, but not without something else going wrong. When I'd pivot my torso and then fire a weapon, my torso would automatically center itself. I gave up and tried Duke. The config file worked, and buttons on the stick seemed to do what they were labeled for (jump, crouch, etc.). The keyboard worked smoothly as well, letting me enlarge the screen, use the jetpack, etc. Surprisingly, considering the stick comes with a config file, the same couldn't be said for Redneck Rampage, which uses the same setup interface as Duke. The preconfigured keys just didn't do what they were supposed to.

The 3D Striker is durable, with a solid feel except for a fragile hat switch. But the quirkiness of its design nagged me the most. The positioning of the trigger button on the top right side of the stick is an awkward adjustment for those bred on ThrustMasters and SideWinders, where the trigger is on the underside. You can never truly grip it. And the large surface area—where the hat switch and four other buttons are located—means that you have to adjust your grip to get to them all.

As for the integrated keyboard, getting it to work with every game can be frustrating. If the design appeals to you, you play mostly DOS games, and you like to deal with glitches, then the 3D Striker may suit your needs. (QuickShot; 408-263-4163; www.quickshot.com; street $50)

—Danny W. Lam

Apocalypse 5D

RATING: D-

Installing a 3D card isn't brain surgery. It should be a quick and painless process. It shouldn't force you to spend four straight hours on the phone with tech support. It shouldn't reduce you to teeth-gnashing and hair-pulling. Perhaps you think I'm not a terribly computer-savvy gal. I am. I tried. I tried really hard. I installed and uninstalled. I connected and disconnected and reconnected to my trusty HP P166. And finally, I packed the card up, gave it back to my editor, and told him that while there's no beauty without pain, I didn't think anything was worth the 24 hours of torture I'd just experienced.

I'm really, really mad.

VideoLogic touts its Apocalypse 5D card as "The ultimate PowerVR gaming combo for PCs." Ha! The card is a combination 2D/3D PC board targeted at those running Windows 95 on a 133MHz Pentium (or better) with 32MB of RAM. At a street price of $275 for the 6MB version and $349 for the 8MB version, I expected the Apocalypse 5D card and its software to be hassle-free and include decent documentation. Unfortunately, getting the drivers and system resources into a state of semi-workable bliss was possible only after several hours on the phone with tech support—adjusting and readjusting interrupt addresses ad nauseam. But the 3D games wouldn't run.

After relenting and agreeing to give the 5D another shot on a similarly configured P200, things went inexplicably better. Don't ask me why. This time around, the card installed without resource conflicts. PowerVR versions of WipeOut and Ultimate Race ran smoothly, as did Direct3D patched games like Interstate '76.

But sadly, the 5D didn't stay trouble-free—its drivers were doing some funky things to Win 95. The worst of it was changes to the display-settings window. The buttons just disappeared as soon as the card was installed: there was nothing to click on. True, you could tab by memory to incognito buttons and press the Enter key, but this was unacceptable. There were also regular system crashes that never used to happen before I installed the 5D. Returning the STB Nitro 3D to the system fixed these problems.

If you're dead set on springing for this card, make sure you actually read the directions thoroughly, because certain installation nuances might ruin initial attempts. The most notable problem is that 2D and 3D driver installations are separate affairs. You should also make sure you really want this card, because you'll probably be spending an awful lot of time with it—and on the phone with VideoLogic. Say hi for me. (VideoLogic; 800-578-5644; www.videologic.com; street $275)

—Leah Reich

TECHNOBABBLE S.O.S.

Bad memory, static, and DOS games

By Patrick Marshall

Q I recently installed Windows 95 as my exclusive operating system. I have games like Ravenloft and Dark Sun that I can't seem to get running. A friend of mine insists that I can get Win 95 to run in DOS mode and should be able to run these games. I have considered buying System Commander or Partition Magic to be able to manage separate operating systems, and I've thought about installing DOS 6.2. Is this a wise decision?

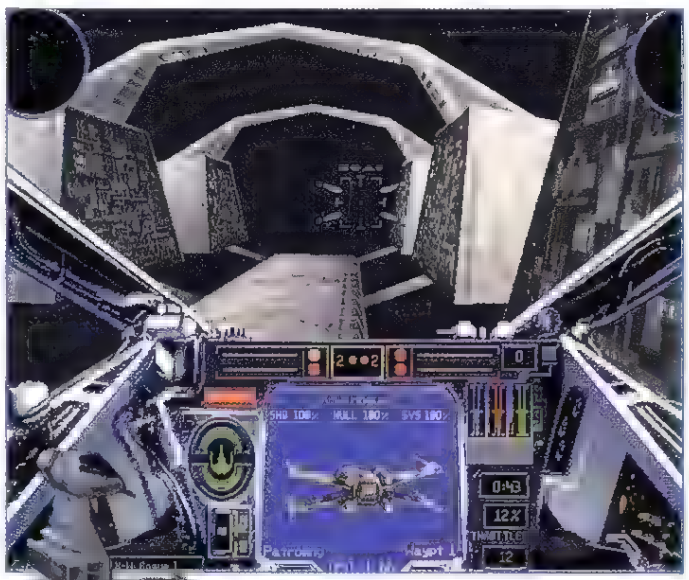
Bob Gaul
Via email

A *Your friend is right about Win 95: You should be able to run most DOS games in its DOS mode. Unfortunately, you don't say anything about error messages or other behaviors that happen when you try. The most common cause of problems, however, is a lack of conventional memory. In some cases, older DOS games require expanded memory, which is simply memory beyond your first megabyte that's been configured to run under an "expanded memory manager."*

There are some things you can do to increase the amount of memory available to DOS games running in Win 95's DOS mode, but most gamers find it easier to create a DOS boot diskette and do without Windows altogether. It's a simpler solution—and requires less disk space—than loading multiple operating systems with programs like Partition Magic.

Most DOS games come with a utility for creating a DOS boot diskette with the appropriate memory settings, or at least have instructions in the manual for doing so. To create a boot diskette for Ravenloft and Dark Sun—as well as other DOS games from SSI—download SSIBOOT.EXE. You'll find it at ***www.ssionline.com/support/boot_disk.html****.*

Q About a month ago, I decided to get some more RAM for my PC, since I was trying to run X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter with only 8MB of memory. I went out and bought one 8MB EDO SIMM. I originally thought I should've bought two 4MB SIMMs, but my manual said I didn't have to. I installed the memory in one of the two free slots I had and turned on my computer. Nothing came on the screen, and there was a constant beeping noise. I opened the case back up and put the SIMM in the other slot. My machine started up fine, but it didn't detect the RAM in either Win 95 or DOS mode. So, I pulled out the SIMM and returned it. Was something wrong with my computer, or did I just need two SIMMs?



Damien Cappello
Clarksboro, NJ

A *If it were me, I'd double-check things with the computer- or motherboard-maker. There are some motherboards that allow you to add single SIMMs, but that's pretty unusual. Every motherboard I've ever had requires SIMMs to be added in matched pairs. The bottom line? Either you got a bad SIMM or, more likely, the manual for your motherboard was wrong, and you need to add two SIMMs of equal capacity.*

Q I have a 486DX2/80 (20MB RAM) with a Turtle Beach Monte Carlo sound card, and a Cirrus Logic PT-524G graphics adapter with CL-GD5422/24 display drivers. Whenever I run my DOS games in high-resolution modes (640-by-480 and beyond), I get unbelievably loud static from my speakers. This only happens in high-res modes, because when I play Doom, for example, there's no static whatsoever. I've tried every possible sound-card configuration, but nothing works.

It's enormously annoying because I can't enjoy the sounds on my favorite DOS games (this doesn't happen with Win 95–native games). My friend recently told me it may be a problem with my video-card settings. WHAT DO I DO?

Flora
Via email

A *Another smart friend. Sounds to me like the game and/or sound card is trying to access memory being used by your graphics adapter. The usual solution is either to change the memory ranges used by the graphics adapter, or to reserve them (using commands in the CONFIG.SYS file) so that other applications don't try to use that memory. I can't be more specific about the memory ranges because I don't know what graphics adapter you're using. Cirrus Logic makes chips that are used on graphics adapters manufactured by other companies. So...you need to check the manual that came with your graphics adapter, or call the maker of the card, to find out how to change memory settings or what memory ranges need to be reserved.*

Mail or email your queries to the S.O.S. staff at:
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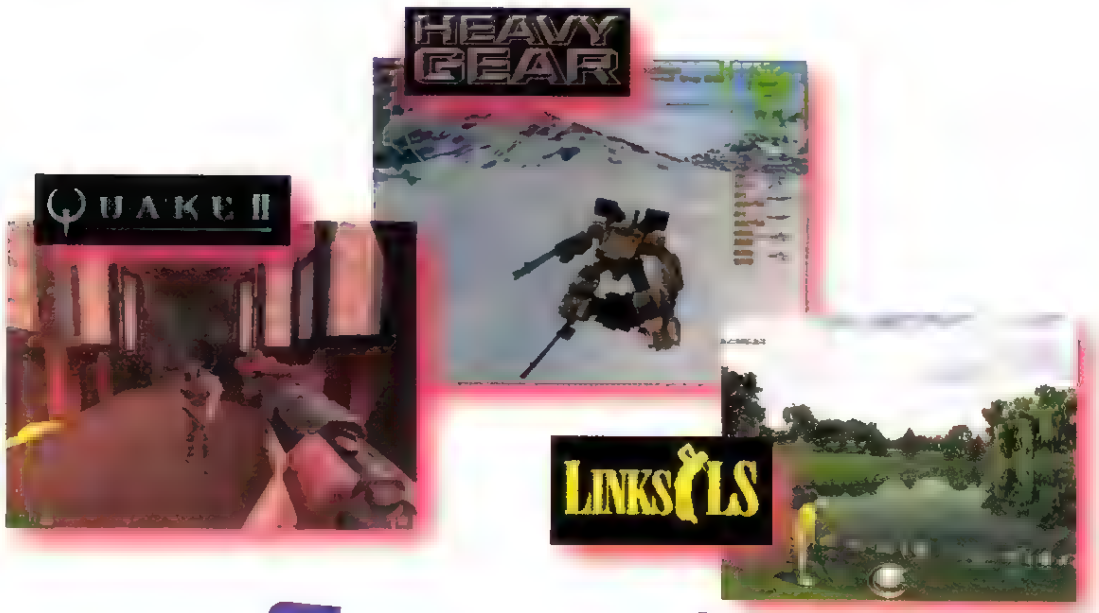

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FACE-OFF

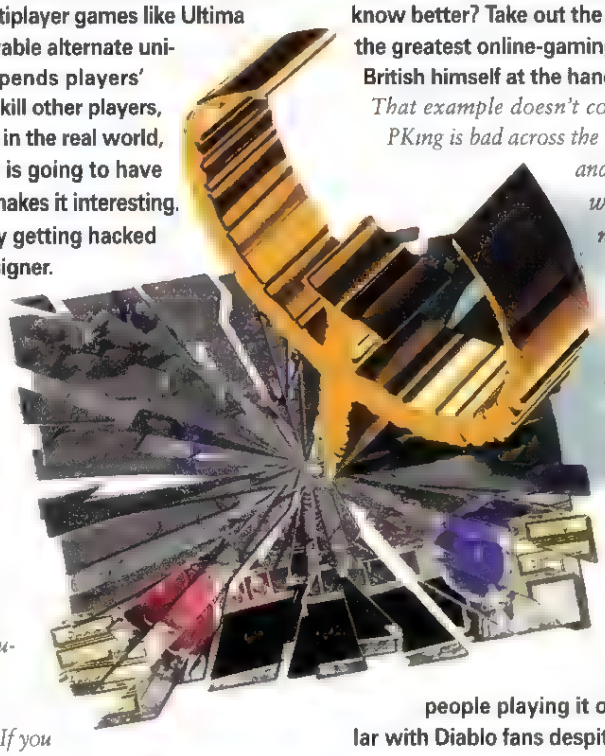
The Player
The Opponent

Kill the Player-Killers?

The appearance of games like Diablo, the growth of Ultima Online, and the anticipation of EverQuest and Asheron's Call have spurred some fierce debate in the online community and the *PC Games* offices over player-killing. Some, such as The Opponent, think whacking fellow players has no place in RPGs, and others, such as The Player, think it's necessary. The Player lectures in righteous **bold**, while The Opponent blathers on in wussie *italics*.

There's no doubt about it, people who abuse the ability to kill other players in games such as Diablo and Ultima Online are evil—but they're a necessary evil. Large multiplayer games like Ultima Online are trying to create a believable alternate universe—a realistic world that suspends players' disbelief. If players weren't able to kill other players, this wouldn't be possible. Just like in the real world, every town, city, and forest in UO is going to have its rotten apples, but that's what makes it interesting. Those who can't hack occasionally getting hacked should stick to Barbie Fashion Designer.

But the problem is that the rotten apples are more prevalent than the sweet, juicy ones. The barrel is starting to rot, and if Ultima Online is going to continue to be a success, it has to attract new players. They are the easy pickings of PKers, and once they get killed by some moron after building up their character for two weeks, they aren't coming back. That doesn't just damage UO or Diablo, it damages the whole concept of community spirit, of cooperative multiplayer games. If you want to be a PKer, play Quake—that's what it's designed for. If you want to role-play, play UO, and don't mix the two.



But new players need to take responsibility; they need to at least read up on the games before they jump in. Newbies can't expect to log into a virtual world and say, "Hey, I'm new, help me out," and not expect someone to take advantage—try that on any New York street corner and you'll see these games are more realistic than you might think. As for PKers ruining community spirit, rent a clue. There's tons of community surrounding PKers—guilds of PKers, gangs of PKers—it's just not the happy, touchy-feely community you want to see.

Then maybe the problem is in the advantages gained from being a PKer. In UO, PKers claim that the reason they do it (aside from being vindictive, aggressive spoilers) is that the rewards are far greater than those for killing a powerful monster. But to my pure mind, that's not an excuse. If there are no other players to kill, how much fun are guilds of PKers going to have? The real gripe is game balance and design.

There's never been a game like UO; how could they possibly account for everything 3,000 people would do in their game? They can't. I'm sure the game will be refined to alleviate the issue of PKing somewhat, but I'm sure they won't ever make it impossible. Why? Because, as even Garriot has said, to do so would hurt the suspension of disbelief in UO. And he's right. After all, who would know better? Take out the ability to PK in UO, and you lose one of the greatest online-gaming events of all time—the death of Lord British himself at the hands of a rogue beta-tester.

That example doesn't count—it was a beta event. And anyway, PKing is bad across the board because it damages the confidence and enthusiasm of many players. The people who suffer are the newbies—like them or not, we need newbies to make the whole online-gaming thing work. Killing them is bad. Killing any other players just for fun ruins the experience for others. And people aren't going to pay for that. Ever.

That example doesn't count? Bollocks! What are we, in the first grade? Beta or no beta, the example stands as a moment that will go down in gaming infamy. And as for no one paying to play cuz the big meanie PKers done went and kilt their little peace-loving selves—that's inane as well. Origin has sold well over 50,000 copies of the game, and there are always tons of people playing it online. Battle.net continues to be popular with Diablo fans despite the rampant hacks and PKing. Why? Because for people with spine, the possibility of getting killed in a virtual world adds immeasurably to the experience.

I don't get a thrill out of developing a character in the touchy-feely tradition of community and then having some selfish malcontent hack me to pieces for a laugh. That is truly bollocks and I won't be heading back to spend more time doing that. Is that really what we're after in these virtual worlds? Virtual murder is just as wrong as the real thing.

The Player can be found in most any online game being mean to newbies, which includes killing them on occasion. The Opponent, meanwhile, can be found holding love-ins in UO Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. PST.

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Stone -GrpW-> -----: Where did DW's Daneloa go?
JT Chasma -GrpW-> -----: It shredded my guts!
I'm out! DEAD!
Stone -GrpW-> -----: I'm gonna need help
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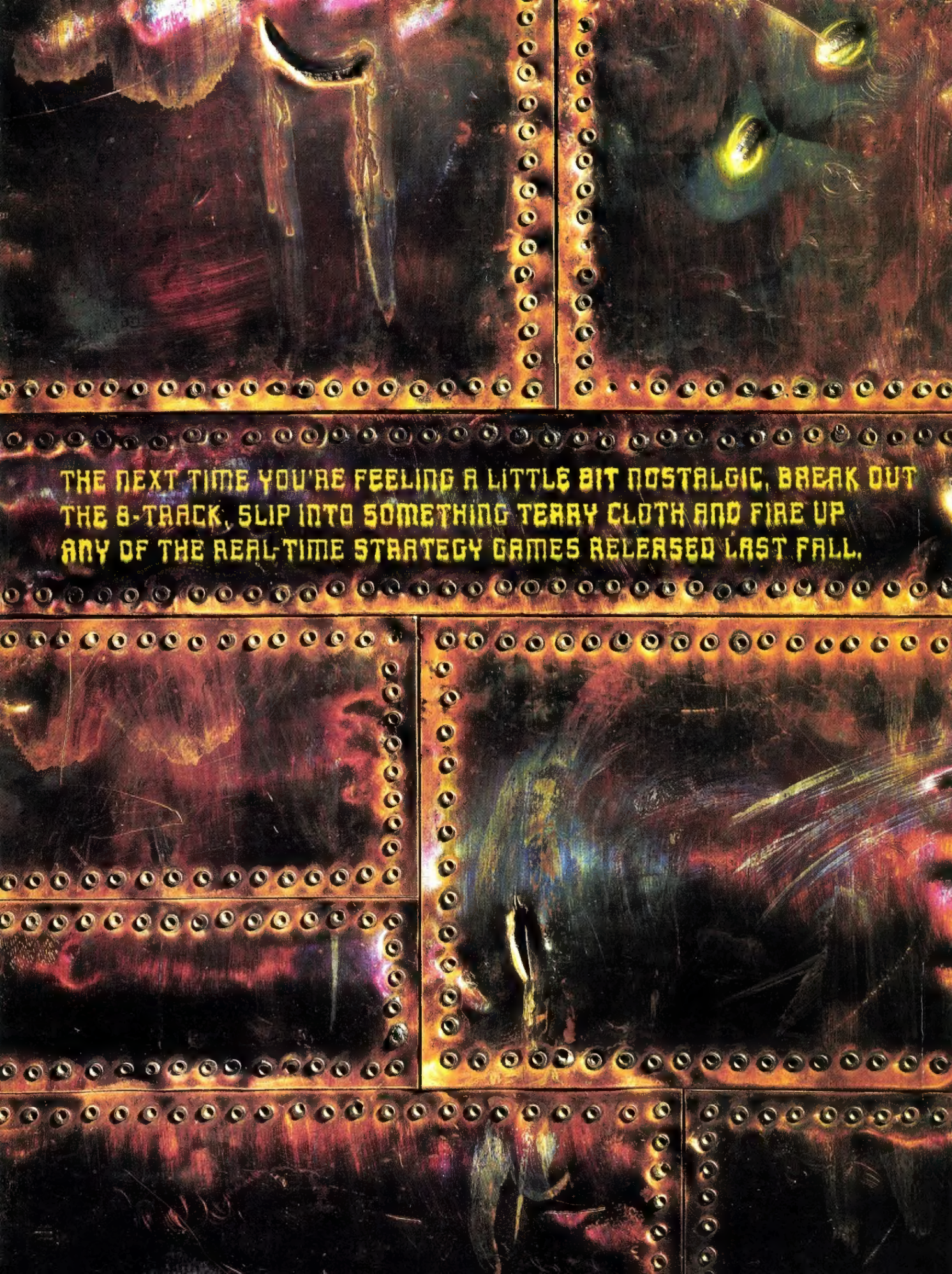
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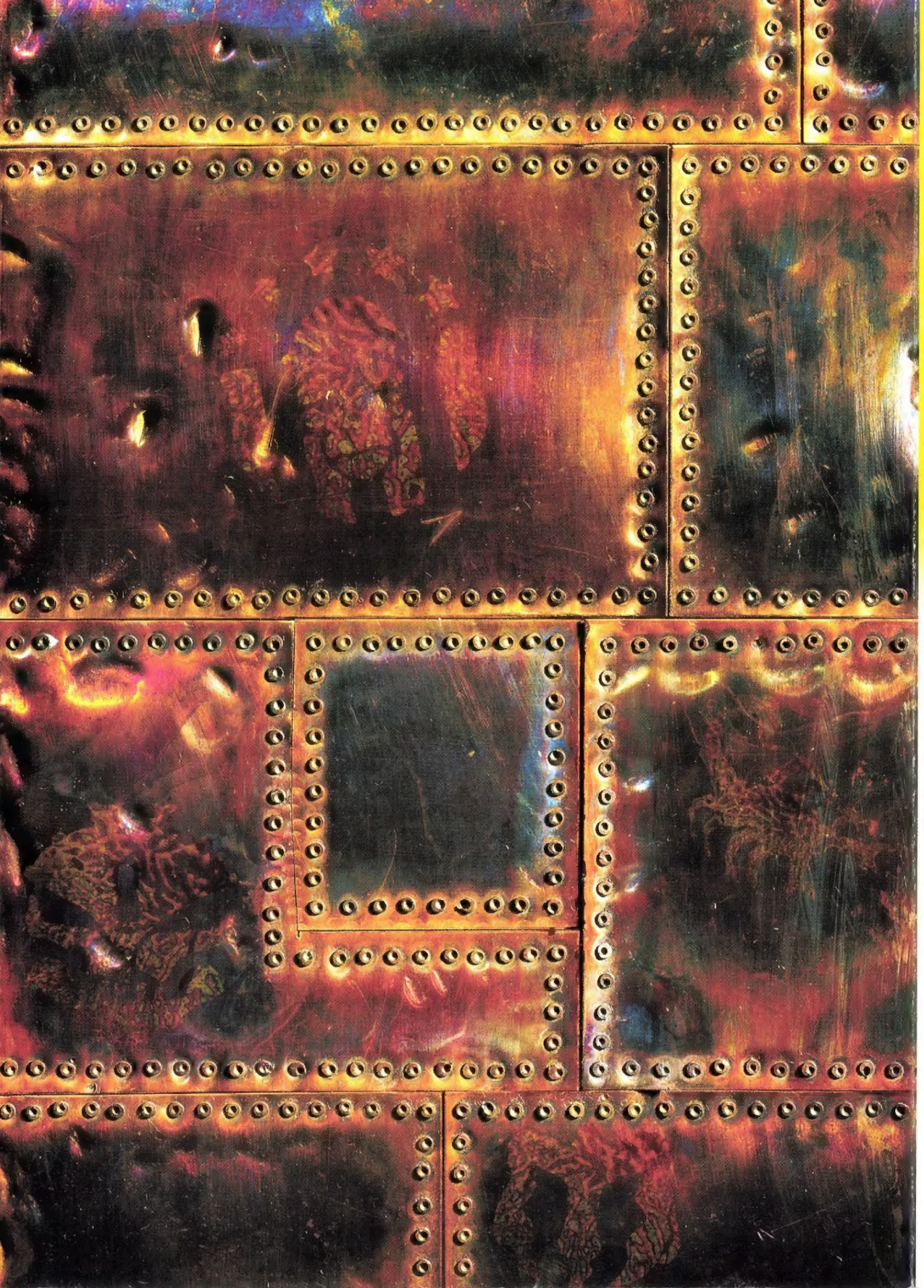

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